

**GREASE AND OCHRE:
The Blending of Two Cultures at the Tasmanian
Colonial Sea Frontier**

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Declaration

This thesis contains no content that has been previously accepted for a degree or diploma awarded by the University of Tasmania or any other institution, and to the best of my knowledge and belief, contains no material previously published or written by another person, except where due reference has been made in the text.

Patricia Cameron

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22 November 2008

Dated

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Abstract

This thesis interrogates the social, cultural and economic dynamics of European and Aboriginal relationships as they unfolded at the colonial sea frontier of Tasmania, spanning a period 1798 to 1830. It argues that the sealers were not a homogenous group of men by character, motivation, or description. Nor were they the primary cause for the demise of the Aboriginal clans along the northeast coast. It also identifies that there was not a homogenous group of clanswomen in role and status, nor were the clanswomen treated as slaves. The thesis finds that the movement of women to the Bass Strait islands was through reciprocal exchange agreements between clansmen and Straitsmen, and both were equally responsible for the repercussions of these decisions. It highlights that the great majority of clanswomen who went to the islands were willing participants in this culturally-based barter system, and they became the resource managers and initiators of the small-island mixed economy.

The thesis rewrites the history of contact relations over the period of three decades and locates the point in time when two cultures collide, fracture, and blend. It remaps northeast territorial placescapes and realigns the connection between the neighbouring lands. It also redefines the timelines from initial social contacts to the fracturing of alliances between the Straitsmen and clanspeople of the northeast lands, thereby redressing former assumptions in the literature.

The research is influenced by the plethora of recycled and sensationalised literary works that to date lack revision and nuance. The orthodox accounts are not fully accurate with a majority remaining silent to the voices of the people whose lives were embedded in this period. This thesis endeavours to fill the gaps

in the literature that have distorted colonial sea frontier history, and endeavours to fill these silences. The thesis has been influenced and shaped by close reading of available sources. It reads between the lines, and in doing so discloses the silences that have persisted over time and across space. It reveals a dynamic, complex and interesting past as it investigates the social, political and economic interconnectedness of human relationships.

Encapsulated within this new account are stories of great hardship, isolation, resilience, toughness, tenderness, brutality and survival. The men and women at the centre of this dissertation are portrayed as two elements: grease and ochre. Together they found a remote and ideal threshold—their liminal space—that enabled the two cultures to blend and form a new, distinct, community that grew and flourished.

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On this epic journey, that has taken me back in time to remarkable placescapes and events, I am fortunate to have had the support of my supervisor, readers and so many of my colleagues, friends and family members.

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I dedicate this thesis to my four children –Melissa, Nicholas, Matthew and Joanne –and nine beautiful grandchildren; Ellyn, Mason, Zachary, Lachlan, Brock, Jake, Kieran, Dylan and Corey.

And Ebony (the dog) for just being there.

The journey has just begun!

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Table 2: 1820 – 1830 Eastern Straitsmen, Furneaux Group, Eastern Bass Strait

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Preface

The title of this work, 'Grease and Ochre: The blending of two cultures at the colonial sea frontier', is profoundly symbolic as it reflects the ancient elements of a culture and the land. The elements earth and water represent dual environments. Separately one is solid and the other fluid. When each is extracted from its place, ochre from the earth and grease from birds and animals, they are altered before blending as one. When blended together grease and ochre form a pigment, not a cold grey as black and white becomes, they mix deep red. The colour is sacred, it is warm and vibrant, and represents the blending of the two cultural groups from which I was born. I hold that we are a product of our history. The blending of two elements that paint much of my being, was made possible because of the liminal space which was protected by the remoteness and surrounded by the beauty of the islands of eastern Bass Strait. Through my mother's line I am directly linked to four Straitsmen: Edward Sydney Mansell, John William Smith, Richard Maynard and John Thomas, and their Tyereelore partners; Pollerrelberner, Pleenperrenna, Wyerlooberer and Teekoolterme. These men and women are my three times great grandparents. At the heart of this extended family group is Teekoolterme's father, my ancestor, Mannalargenna. He was a wise and deeply spiritual bungunna (leader), and known as a seer amongst his people. Mannalargenna was passionate about grease and ochre and painted himself all over with the red pigment. In writing this dissertation I honour my ancestors who came from both sides of the sea frontier with the same frailties, feelings and emotions, as all humankind. If through this dissertation the voices of my ancestors are heard, I will have restored them as partners in the shaping of our colonial past.

Introduction

Much has been said about the men who hunted seal on the colonial sea frontier of eastern Bass Strait. Even more has been said about their involvement with the Aboriginal people of northeast Tasmania, particularly the women. There are two orthodox accounts that predominate in the literature and that have shaped our thinking about these characters and this period of colonial history. The central orthodoxy is found in the diaries of George Augustus Robinson and colonial newspaper reports that firstly portray the sealers as brutal and abusive hardened men who came to the colonial shores raping and killing, and secondly that they were responsible for the demise of many Aboriginal nations.

The marginal orthodoxy has been written on behalf of some factions of the present day Aboriginal community; an orthodoxy lent further credence by their academic supporters. This account acknowledges the sealers as necessary, but minor participants in a process that ultimately ensured the survival of the Tasmanian Aboriginal peoples. The marginal account considers these men as culturally insignificant, or mere bystanders, in the story of the emergence of a Tasmanian Aboriginal Community based historically on the islands in Bass Strait. The impulse of this second account is more politically motivated, with a narrow focus on the return of land, and viewing the islands as culturally significant symbols of the present day Aboriginal political struggle. The sealers have little, or no place, in that agenda. Paradoxically, contemporary historians, Lyndall Ryan, Stephen Murray-Smith and Rebe Taylor, in their appraisal of primary sources have presented both these views. One confirms the sealers as being responsible for the demise of some of the clans, the

other than the sealers were responsible for the survival of the Tasmanian Aboriginal people.

As suggested, there are several significant differences between the two historical accounts of the sealers and their role in contact relations on the colonial sea frontier. At one extreme, the sealers were viewed as brutish and predatory miscreants and lawless renegades who oppressed Aboriginal people and were disrespectful of Aboriginal culture. They are raiders, abductors, slave masters, rapists and murderers. Further, their conduct was based on avarice and self-gratification, and they were primary villains responsible for the ultimate demise of several tribes in northern and eastern Tasmania. At the other end of the spectrum, the sealers are implicated in the survival of Aboriginal culture by entering into traditional marriage law with Aboriginal women, and allowing their wives, and their children, to continue some of their traditions through their participation in the island's economic activities.

There are a number of key points that can be claimed both of European men and clanswomen who were closely associated with them at the colonial sea frontier. Sealers have been described as a homogenous group. 'The Sealers' are stereotyped as a generic group. They are condemned by character and discussed as having shared the same time period, agenda, and purpose over three decades from 1798 to 1830. The Aboriginal women have also been represented as a homogenous group, sharing the same status and character over the same time span as 'the sealers' and having a collective agenda. This monolithic mode of conceptualisation lacks nuances, depth and substance. It also ignores the voices of those involved in a rich and complex story of human relations that changed and adapted over time.

This dissertation aims to present new understandings about resource management, economies of scale, cultural practice and adaptations, traditional protocols, motivations, philosophies, laws, and gender relations, using primary materials including archaeological surveys, historical journals, maps, diaries, newspaper articles, as well as numerous secondary sources.

The approach undertaken is that of a close reading examining from the inside the journal entries of George Augustus Robinson which as a collection represent the most significant primary source containing the most thorough and extensive documentation of sealer/Aboriginal relations available. Close examination of primary materials are achieved by reading between the lines, locating key words and teasing out sentences that harbour a wealth of information that would be otherwise overlooked. There is no doubt that Robinson wrote what he saw and recorded what his informants told him, however his value judgements of people and events have to be viewed with his personal biases and motivations in mind.

The orthodoxy has dictated the story, whereby neither the sealer's nor the clanwomen's voices have been heard or examined. This dissertation seeks to find the gaps between the two accounts in order to expose a richer and more complex understanding of the relations between the two cultural groups at the colonial sea frontier. The primary resources are a 'Pandora's Box', that when opened allow us to hear the once-silent voices of the participants in this incredibly important story. It is anticipated that this work will paint a new picture of sealer/Aboriginal relations. As the story unfolds, a deeper and fuller understanding of colonial sea frontier relationships, and crucially important timelines, will be revealed.

There are two cultural groups from different hemispheres that play an active role in relations on the colonial sea frontier. On one side the Tasmanian Aborigines have ancient roots in the land in which they belong and on the other, the sealers are relative newcomers, arriving as seamen involved in colonial maritime activities. They first set eyes on each other over the beachhead. Each conscious of the others existence, the two groups made visual contact—one from the sea and the other from the land. Eventually the sealers were invited to become part of the Aboriginal world. This resulted in the forging of close social relations. The challenges faced in this process were complex. Some challenges would bring the two groups together and others would threaten to tear them apart. Ultimately, however, despite all the odds being against them, they endured and the interface enabled the two cultural elements to blend—one of earth and the other of the sea—to form a new and shared culture and to grow and thrive as a community.

The work is made up of three chapters, each arranged in sections that comprise interrelated themes. Chapter One comprises three major themes that outline the culture of Tasmanian Aboriginal people who spoke the same language and practiced traditions and laws that entwined and governed every aspect of their social, political, economic, and spiritual lives. Chapter Two has three major themes. Firstly, it unravels the nature of relations that emerged at the colonial sea frontier from 1798 to 1820, identifying the characters, motivations, and activities of the men who were directly and indirectly associated with the islands of eastern Bass Strait. Secondly, it seeks to define time lines and examine events that will portray a more accurate picture of the movement of people during this period, and thirdly, it seeks to understand the

nature of relations that took place during the earliest stages of contact. The third chapter contains four themes that interrogate contact relations on the land and sea frontiers. It follows a chronological sequence of events from the initial impressions of the two cultural groups, focussing on the arrival of a new breed of men who would become settlers on the Bass Strait islands and who would establish social contact with their closest neighbours on the northeast coast. This third chapter explores the impetus that made it possible for the two cultural groups—the sealers and the Aboriginal women—to form meaningful relations and develop mutual economic advantages. It seeks to understand the impacts when two cultures collided and to identify what I have called the liminal space where two cultures blended.

Chapter One: Being and Belonging in Country

This chapter explores the traditional form and nature of the Coastal Plains¹ society, providing an overview of the social, spiritual and economic spheres of the people who lived on the coastal fringe of northeast Trouwunna.² The chapter is organised into three primary sections that have been subdivided into a range of topics. The intention is to use this information as a backdrop to contact relations as they developed on the colonial frontier of Van Diemen's Land between 1798 and 1830. The discussion will facilitate a greater appreciation and understanding of the relations that unfolded between the two cultural groups as they collided, fractured, and blended.

1.1 The Coastal Plains Country and its People

This section aims to trace the journey of Trouwunna³ people as they moved across the island, now known as Tasmania, during ancient times. It will describe the placescapes⁴ and environments particular to those who came to belong in the northeast region of the island. It will examine the importance of particular territories to the Coastal Plains people, their seasonal rhythms within the northeast lands, and

¹ The writer has chosen a new name for the people who lived in the northeast lands. They will be called the Coastal Plains people or Coastal Plains clans, in place of the 'North East tribe or band' that has been used in past literary works. The significance of the 'Coastal Plains' title is to place the emphasis on the description and form of the country in which the people dwelt, and where they belonged, rather than identify a people by geographic location only.

² Trouwunna (also spelt Trouwerner) is the name for the heart shaped island that became known as Van Diemen's Land, and later renamed Tasmania (Plomley, 1966: 961).

³ Trouwunna is used to describe the culture and peoples who lived in Trouwunna before, and immediately after, its colonisation by the British.

⁴ This term is employed by philosopher Dr. Linn Miller to emphasise that places are not merely locations or physical backdrops, but exist in experience as an assemblage of entities and elements – physical, social, cultural and spiritual – the combination of which shape their character and define their identities (Miller *et al*, 2008: 207-19).

the influences that determined where they lived. Of primary importance to this section is to explore the inter-connected patterns of settlement within the different placescapes. It will investigate whether people's movement across their lands was influenced by seasonal change or other cultural factors. Further, it will seek to unravel the regional diversity that was particular to the Coastal Plains people.

1. 1. 1 Ancient peoples and ancient landscapes.

The Coastal Plains people were quintessentially dwellers of the coastal margins and open plains of the northeast region of Trouwunna. This part of the island comprised an extensive coastal fringe connected to the hinterland ranges by sinuous river systems. The rivers and their tributaries fed into wide estuarine environments and scattered lagoons, to create a well-watered landscape (Kee, 1987: 3-13). The country contained extensive sandy plains interspersed with undulating hills (Plomley, 1966: 252), which were distinctive when compared with other Trouwunna regions. Many higher elevations along the coast provided ideal lookout points, and from the apex of hinterland mountain ranges, panoramic views were possible across most of the northeast region (Plomley, 1966: 249, 265, 358 & 407). From such elevated places the mountain ranges on Cape Barren Island, and the highest peaks of the Strzelecki Range on Flinders Island, could be seen on clear days (Appendix 2: Map 5). A number of smaller islands across Banks Strait including Chappell Island, Clarke Island, and Preservation Island, were also visible. Waterhouse Island, Swan Island, small islets and rocky outcrops that hugged the coastline (Appendix 2: Map 3), were familiar to the Coastal Plains people who lived in this country.

It was during the extremely cold period some thirty-five thousand years ago, that the ancestors of the Trouwunna people lived in the southern-most peninsula of the greater island continent. As specialist hunters of red-necked wallaby, the people had travelled great distances across a wide and arid isthmus into the rich grasslands that were the principal hunting grounds to the south (Kiernan *et al*, 1983: 1-4). For over ten thousand years, these Ice Age hunters and their families sheltered from the extreme cold inside caves and rock shelters in the remote southwest regions of Trouwunna (Kiernan *et al*, 1983: 1-4). For over twenty thousand years, the many generations of people left behind the traces of their meals, tools, and ochred expressions of ceremony inside the recesses of limestone caves (Flood, 1999: 118-25). They lived in this bitterly cold southern region until their environment transformed in response to a warming climate.

As the last extremely cold cycle ended, and the Earth's climate warmed, ice sheets that once covered massive areas of the northern hemisphere melted. This event expanded the oceans and sea levels around the globe rose significantly (Flood, 1999: 209). Over several thousand years the expanding seas flooded the isthmus which had connected the main continental landmass to the far southern region, creating the island of Trouwunna. The peoples retreated as the sea levels enveloped the lowlands and they became separated on each side of what is now known as Bass Strait (Flood, 1999: 195-209; Kee, 1987: 10-2). It is possible that those people, who remained on the Trouwunna side of the strait were family groups who had lived along the southern fringes of the greater continent, who undertook seasonal hunting expeditions into the far southern regions. Such seasonal journeys may have

continued as long as the bassian isthmus existed, and the Ice Age hunters were guided to their summer hunting grounds by using the ice-covered mountains that were visible from the Victorian highlands,⁵ as a beacon.

As the families walked several hundred kilometres across the isthmus over several thousand years, traces of their campsites beside the ancient seacoast were subsequently submerged as the seas formed Bass Strait, leaving higher granitic outcrops as islands (Brown, 1988: 97). On the edge of eastern Bass Strait two significant living places have been relocated and surveyed. Cultural remains at Mannalargenna Cave (Smith *et al*, 1993: 258-71), Prime Seal Island and Beeton Rockshelter (Sim and Stuart, 1991: 27-31; Sim and Gait, 1992: 1-19), and Badger Island, provide evidence that humans commenced living on a permanent basis in the area from about eighteen thousand years ago. Likewise, archaeological surveys have recovered places along the southern margins of Bass Strait, Rocky Cape and Rushy Lagoon, which date from about ten thousand years ago. It appears that as the sea level rose and encroached across the bassian isthmus some families may have moved onto higher ground that would become islands, while the others retreated into the Trouwunna and Victorian mainlands.

Evidence from archaeological surveys and site excavations establishes that people have lived in the northeast for at least eight thousand three hundred years (Kee, 1987: Appendix 3). The basal date for occupation provided a minimum

⁵ In 2006 Doug Pattison produced a digital imaged map to demonstrate the landscape during the last glacial period from the top of the Grampians in eastern Victoria. It shows a virtual coastline along what has been called the Bassian Plain [in this dissertation it is called bassian isthmus], and the mountains in Trouwunna are clearly visible to the south. Pattison's work has not been published.

timeline for people living in the heart of Tebrikunna⁶ (Taylor, 1995: 111) territory, who were possibly the direct ancestors to the Coastal Plains clanspeople of more recent times. The ancient camping place on the Tebrikunna inland plains, at what is now Rushy Lagoon, although it may not be the oldest living place in the northeast, clearly demonstrates that human occupation in this area reached back into the distant past. Whilst the knowledge of many aspects of this culture has been lost as sites disappeared through processes of natural erosion, human interference and the banishment of clans from their traditional lands in the early nineteenth century, some traces of the essence of Trouwunna society survives in archaeological and ethnographic records.

1. 1. 2 A land of coastal plains and saltwater fringe.

The total landmass of Trouwunna was divided into the lands of at least nine different nations of clanspeople,⁷ each physically separated from their neighbouring borders by mountain ranges, rivers or other distinctive landmarks (Ryan, 1996: 15). These nine nations comprised about forty-eight clans (Ryan, 1996: 16), or extended family groups, each headed by a bungunna (leader) who was usually a powerful male. The collective territories of the Coastal Plains people comprised about 5,000 square kilometres of land wedged between the seacoast and high hinterland mountain ranges (Ryan, 1996: 20). A coastline of some 150 kilometres extended from the southeast boundary that was defined by the prominent rocky outcrop of St Patrick's Head,

⁶ Tebrikunna is one of the Coastal Plains language names for the northeast peninsula (Cape Portland) of Trouwunna, and was recorded by George Augustus Robinson in 1830. See also John Taylor, *Tasmanian Place Names- The Aboriginal Connection*, 1995: 111. Where possible this dissertation will use Coastal Plains language for placescapes

⁷ Nation will be used instead of 'tribe' which is used by Ryan and other commentators, as my preferred term. In this context 'nation' describes a collective of clans, each of whom had their own territory or country, shared the same homeland with its distinct boundaries that separate them from neighbouring nations, and they spoke the same language.

westward to the Pipers River situated on the northern coast (Ryan, 1996: 20-1). The Coastal Plains nation had three neighbours. To the southeast of the Scamander River was the land of the Oyster Bay nation (Ryan, 1996: 17-20), to the westward of the Pipers River was the Stoney Creek⁸ nation, and at the foothills of Ben Lomond range their southern border met with the Penny Royal Creek⁹ (Plomley, 1966: 286) nation (Appendix 2: Map 1).

The Coastal Plains lands comprised scattered lagoons with major rivers and their tributaries that led to expansive freshwater estuaries and sheltered saltwater inlets (Appendix 2: Map 3). Across the region vegetation ranged from wet sclerophyll forests with their dense tree fern understorey, ti-tree swamplands, to sandy banks of lightly wooded scrub and heath-lands that were dispersed along the coastal margins. These diverse environments were connected by corridors of native grasslands and button grass marshlands described by Robinson in 1830 as ideal country for the people (Plomley, 1966: 248, 250 & 252-54). The country provided an abundant supply of perennial fresh water and a rich environment for the Coastal Plains people enabling them to live in harmonious cultural rhythms with their lands.

1. 1. 3 Belonging to Country.

Critical to the survival of all the nations in Trouwunna was an intimate knowledge of the environment in which the clans lived and thrived for tens of thousands of seasons.

One colonial author wrote of this intimacy:

Their geographic knowledge of the country in which they live is remarkably accurate and minute. The relative bearings and distances of its more prominent headlands, bays, mountains, lakes, and rivers are distinctly impressed on their minds. When at any time a chart of

⁸ Stoney Creek nation is also known as North Midlands tribe (Ryan, 1996: 29-32).

⁹ Penny Royal Creek nation is identified as the Ben Lomond tribe (Ryan, 1996: 33-5).

Tasmania is presented to them, [they were], only to embody the picture of its form and dimensions which their own fancy had enabled them to sketch (Dove in Roth, 1899: 160).

Dove's quote indicated the depth of knowledge that the Trouwunnans had of their placescapes. Furthermore, their ability to interpret and draw two-dimensional maps, and identify the landmarks within, was achieved even though their world-view of country was in a three-dimensional form.

The Coastal Plains people could read their environment for signs of the approach of fishing, hunting and gathering seasons (Plomley, 1966: 633). They also knew by the clouds and the moon when and where to build their shelters, when to travel inland, or go to the coast to exploit a wide variety of saltwater foods. During the 1830s Robinson remarked on the people's abilities to read the signs correctly to forecast approaching weather conditions. These skills were acknowledged and relied upon by white men, who would seek consultation on weather matters that were found to be usually correct (Plomley, 1966: 300). Robinson was told that when the clouds 'fly swiftly along [it signifies] no rain. Further, a circle around the moon [is a] sure sign of bad weather, [and] plenty of wind', [and] 'if light clouds appear ... it is a sign of fine weather' (Plomley, 1966: 300). These observations were obviously the result of the clans being acutely aware of their surroundings, watching for signs and testing their predictions over many generations.

The Coastal Plains nation was distinguished by their language, geography, environment, and cultural practices (Kee, 1987: 17). The nation was separated into clan territories that each extended family group claimed as their own country (Plomley, 1966: 254). The individual clan believed their country belonged to them

and they to it. Robinson remarked in the 1830s that ‘The aborigines (sic) of Van Diemen’s Land are patriots, staunch lovers of their country (Plomley, 1966: 302), and this deep affection and sense of belonging went from the macro —the nation lands—to the micro, their particular territorial country. Thus the people, their culture and lands, were inseparable and intrinsically intertwined.

According to historian Shayne Breen ‘Country demands to be honoured, that ceremonies be performed, that resources be managed sustainably’, [and that it provided] ‘physical sustenance, persona and group identity and spirituality’. Breen believes that country is, ‘a sacred entity to which people are bound by unchanging law put in place by ancestral spirits who created the land’ (Breen and Summers, 2006, 19). Statements such as these indicate a depth of spiritual, social and physical connections between the people and their lands. Given this attachment, the consequences would have been severe if the people were not able to physically and spiritually honour and care for their country. It presupposes that Trouwunnan people were governed by ancient laws, and it was these laws that determined how country, and everything within and above it, should be treated. Country was the place where a person was born. A clanswoman born at Tebrikunna stated emphatically to Robinson that she belonged to that territory: ‘that my country’ (Plomley, 1966: 240 & 254), and that place remained her country regardless of having lived on Preservation Island from childhood. This clanswoman had an intimate claim to this territory.

There were other instances when intense emotions were exhibited, and wistful eyes were cast toward their country as clanspeople passed in close proximity

(Plomley, 1966: 407; Roth, 1899: 37), usually from the deck of a passing boat. The clan leader of Tebrikunna country, Mannalargenna, displayed his attachment to his country as he projected deep emotion. '[H]is joy was unbounded' wrote Robinson, when the bungunna was told he was returning from exile on the Bass Strait islands to walk on his lands in 1831 (Plomley, 1966: 394). Again, Robinson described Mannalargenna's performance when surveying the coastline and its landmarks, using a telescope from the deck of a passing ship. He showed 'strong emotion, [when he] paced the deck ... to and fro like a man of consequence, like an emperor At one time he took the map in his hand and looked at it intently, took the spyglass and looked through it' (Plomley, 1987: 295-96). Mannalargenna personified the profound emotional connections to his country that are echoed in Breen's words above.

The Coastal Plains clanspeople's sense of direction, especially where to locate strategically placed logs over river crossings (Plomley, 1966: 400 & 406), and other places within the landscape, was achieved without the need of distinct pathways (Plomley, 1966: 399). There is no evidence of the Coastal Plains clans having interconnected series of pathways across their territories, as was found in other Trouwunna nation lands. Instead, low undulating plains, managed and designed using fire techniques, provided ideal wide corridors that interconnected densely vegetated landscapes and allowed ease of movement for families and hunting groups to travel between their favourite camping places (Plomley, 1966: 252). Their observations and knowledge were so intricate that they could identify footprints of individuals who entered their lands from other nations (Plomley: 1966, 408). They

also located with ease concealed bundles of lances, or spears not normally used for hunting game, that were strategically placed within the woodlands for the purpose of defence, to demonstrate strength, and to intimidate others (Plomley, 1966: 268). The Coastal Plains people were intimately aware of every part of their clan country and nation lands.

Each clan remained vigilant to potential intrusion into their country, and watched the surrounding horizons from high lookout points for signs of approaching strangers who trespassed into their country from the land or sea (Plomley, 1966: 265-66). They could identify the movement of people by the rising smoke from campfires, or from firing the land, and also recognised the crews of passing vessels as friendly or hostile (Plomley, 1966: 226). The chance of them being surprised by visitors, friendly or otherwise, who may have arrived unannounced into their country, was slight because of their alertness to any changes in their immediate and neighbouring environments, as well as maintaining constant surveillance of the sea coast.

1. 1. 4 Dwellers of the coastal plains, sea coast, and waterways.

Unlike other nations who moved between elevations at certain times of the year, the Coastal Plains dwellers harvested the resources of the sea, coastal fringe and adjacent plains simultaneously (Roth, 1899: 105). According to Robinson's observations, the people moved between living places often, rarely camping in one place for more than two days (Plomley, 1966: 244). However, this pattern may have been in response to the clans being subjected to colonial siege and being forced to move often during the time Robinson was in the northeast. Although Robinson noted they 'seldom travel

far', by his example they could have travelled up to twenty kilometres a day because their modified landscapes facilitated ease of travel (Plomley, 1966: 244). Their favoured living places remained predominantly within the coastal margins and adjacent to the men's hunting grounds on the inland plains (Kee, 1987: 14). The great majority of inland camping or living places were situated along seacoast and fresh water margins that were closer to the women's collecting and harvesting grounds.

Robinson described the northeast as 'altogether the finest country I have seen' (Plomley, 1966: 255), and this fine country was because the Coastal Plains clansmen nurtured and modified their environments. The clansmen managed the heathy undulating banks and grasslands, as well as the woodlands and wetlands throughout their territory, using fire technology to ensure the greatest economic return and continuity of important resources (Plomley, 1966: 260, 255 & 258). They built large domed bark huts and open shelters or lean-tos, usually within sight of the saltwater, along the rivers, and beside the lagoons and estuaries (Plomley, 1966: 261, 264, 285 & 374). Having no inclination or enticement to move away from the seacoast and river systems into the higher elevations, or between cooler and warmer environments, their choice of living places did not seem to be influenced by the seasonal change throughout most of the year. Historian Lyndall Ryan (1996, 21) confirmed a close coastal association when she remarked that the northeast clans moved parallel to the seacoast to exploit food resources from mid winter to late autumn. She concluded that the people in the northeast shared this peculiarity with one other nation in Trouwunna.

The coast and its immediate hinterland was capable of supporting a high Aboriginal population during most seasons of the year Of all the people in Aboriginal Tasmania, the North East people travelled least [A] mild climate and abundant resources on both the coast and hinterland gave them an insularity comparable only to the South East people (Ryan, 1991: 21).

In using the term insularity Ryan pointed to a defining feature, that is, the motivation for being in any one place at a particular time of the year. The Coastal Plains clan's cultural practice appears to have been long standing and they did not have to change these traditions to accommodate the newcomers. They were never far from the coast at any one time. By surmising that the Coastal Plains people travelled least when compared to the other nations, Ryan acknowledges a range of factors that contributed to this conditioning including economic and social demands, and a stable climate. The clansmen's management of their environment allowed ease of movement across the plains to travel to inland hunting grounds and back to coastal camps within the same day.

Excursions into the higher elevations, or away from freshwater courses, were sporadic. Treks deep into the hinterland, beyond the plains, were for specific purposes over short periods (Kee, 1987: 55). The clanspeople travelled high into the mountain ranges, such as the Blue Tier, for ceremonial purposes where they left their symbols etched in the rocks (Bednarik *et al*, 2007: 161-70). This extensive highland ceremonial location, that has been recently surveyed and reappraised, is believed to be unique in Tasmania.¹⁰ The area in which these symbols are found demonstrates a profound association between the Coastal Plains clanspeople and the high mountains of the northeast.

¹⁰ This should not detract from the probability that traces of ceremonial expressions in highland areas of Tasmania remain undiscovered or are yet to be confirmed.

On the occasions when they did travel across their boundaries into neighbouring nation's lands it was again for specific purposes, and because they had no need to hunt or collect seasonal foods outside their territorial lands, it was not to access food resources. Rather, their reason for external visits was to maintain strong alliances, exchange valuable items such as ochre, to acquire women in marriage, share new ideas, and participate in ceremonial activities (Ryan, 1996: 23). The people of the northeast were self-contained with a great quantity of economic resources, yet they were socially and spiritually interactive outside of their borders with neighbouring nations.

Their selective and flexible interaction with the environment was in many regards unique to the Coastal Plains clan's existence. The northeast geography of wide and open plains facilitated an exceptional method of travelling by identified landmarks, and use of observation points, that allowed them flexibility of movement, unlike other groups who had to stay on formed pathways when travelling between locations (Plomley, 1966: 400 & 06). Travelling by observation they used familiar landmarks such as high hills, burnt ground, headlands, particular trees and vegetation types, as well as island coordinates and rocky outcrops to locate their position (Plomley, 1966: 399). The Coastal Plains people walked across their placescapes that were kept clear over many generations of mosaic burning, which was described by Robinson as being 'burnt in patches' (Plomley, 1966: 248). Placescapes of lightly wooded areas interspersed with grassland (Plomley, 1966: 258, 265, 383, 368 & 398), were deliberately sculptured for a range of specific purposes that would suit the Coastal Plains clan's cultural customs as well as create ideal habitats for plants and

animals. Therefore, the clansmen were intensive and methodical managers of their environment. Their efforts were repaid by creating cleared spaces to walk and hunt effectively, and encouraging an abundance of resources to hunt, trap and harvest. The modified landscape served its purpose because if Robinson's party is anything to go by (Plomley, 1966: 255 & 380), the Coastal Plains people had the capacity to travel up to thirty kilometres per day. They could choose where and when to stop overnight, or for longer periods (Plomley, 1966: 244, 250, 252, 384 & 388), because the distance between one place and another was within one day's walk.

The Pyemairrennerpairrener clan, whose lands were southeast of Mt. Horror (Plomley, 1966: 372), when travelling from the hinterlands on route to the Georges Bay estuary and the seacoast, followed the banks of the Georges River, rather than creating and maintaining distinct pathways through heavily wooded and hilly terrain (Plomley, 1966: 371 & 397). This clan had narrow plains intersected by tiers of hills that ran parallel to the coast and, like the other Coastal Plains clanspeople, they used the river valleys as their pathway between the seacoast and adjacent plains.

There was only one remarkably defined thoroughfare used by the Coastal Plains nation, described by Robinson as an aligned walking track. It was located behind Mt Horror, and stretched from Georges Bay in an east/west direction through the Scottsdale district, and then towards the adjoining border with the Stoney Creek clan lands, to converge at the Pipers River. The northeast road proceeded on through the Leterrmairrener (Plomley, 1971: map 4, & 21) clanlands to the eastern side of the Tamar River (Plomley, 1966: 372). This sinuous corridor would have been a significant feature in the landscape as shown in the Coastal Plains clan's cultural

placescape map (Appendix 2: Map 1), for it connects with all the clan territories. The approximate alignment of the road provides a key to the clan's economic, spiritual and social activity as a united nation of people, providing the one common link between all the clan territories that confederated them into one or more extended family groups when necessary. The roadway also provides an explanation as to why inland treks away from the coast were for specific purposes that could involve all, or some, of the clans.¹¹ The Coastal Plains clans were not required to traverse by way of the longer coastline route, or cross other clan hunting grounds in the hinterlands to visit their extended families in other territories. The road was their means of travel for this purpose. As a useful thoroughfare it allowed clans to avoid contact with others they had conflict with.

1. 1. 5 Living with the seasons.

With a stable maritime climate, when compared to the extremes of climatic fluctuations in most other regions of Trouwunna, the northeast region experiences mild winters and cool summers (Kee, 1987: 3). The stable climate is influenced by westerly winds combined with warm sea currents that flow into Banks Strait and south down the east coast along the great continental shelf. In the northeast the clan's lifestyle has been described as comparable to the peoples of the west coast, as they too simultaneously exploited a wide range of resources at the coastal margins and adjacent hinterlands, whilst most other Trouwunna groups travelled into the interior or to the coastal margins and stayed in each place for months at a time

¹¹ The road probably provided a meeting place, as a common landmark, behind each clan territory. It could be where clans converged for ceremonial activity, met to hunt as confederated expeditions, travelled together to neighbouring nations, and as a means to quickly skirt clan territories if there was a reason to avoid them.

(Cosgrove, 1990: 25). The difference between the two different regions –the west coast and the northeast coast –is that it was the cold climate and rugged terrain on the west coast that determined their patterns of settlement. The elements dictated the people’s living places on the west coast, whereas, the people of the Coastal Plains could choose where they would live.

An example of the exceptional choice of settlement is the exploitation of swans and their eggs as nutritious and favoured economic resources. The egg harvest required the Coastal Plains people to be alerted and guided by weather patterns. The timing of egg laying was not governed by firm seasons, but was dependent on the arrival of heavy rains to inundate the nesting places (Brown, 1991:77). Whether rains came early or late the people were required to be prepared to move their families to the swan rookeries to harvest the eggs.

Swan rookeries were located across clan lands in wetlands at the Great Forester River near Bridport (Plomley, 1966: 382, 405 & 407), Waterhouse lagoons (Plomley, 1966: 248), Big and Little Musselroe inlets (Plomley, 1966: 254, 256 & 391), and at Moulting Lagoon in the Georges Bay estuary. All were favoured collecting and feasting placescapes for extended family gatherings. Being able to respond to unpredictable seasonal fluctuations exemplified the degree of cultural flexibility of the Coastal Plains clans. Evidence of this practice can be found in Robinson’s journals (Plomley, 1966: 382 & 391), with clanswomen monitoring the activity at the swan rookeries after the arrival of heavy rains for egg laying activity in the wetlands.

Another exceptional circumstance that clearly demonstrated flexibility with timing travel to coincide with the collection of an important economic resource involved reading changes in the landscape for seasonal patterns to predict the accurate timing of yolla egg laying after the yolla, or muttonbird, arrived in early spring (Plomley, 1976: 152, 273 & 283). The arrival of yolla heralded significant gathering expeditions to access this rich and vital dietary food source. As the main collectors of birds and their eggs, Coastal Plains clanswomen determined when the families were required to travel, and where they would camp close to the rookeries (Plomley, 1991: 38-9). As the examples of two exceptional food gathering events show, the Coastal Plains clans depended on the knowledge and skills of the women to monitor the bird's activities and prepare for the people to journey close to the egg laying grounds. Exact timing was crucial, as too late after laying and the resource would spoil.

There were seasonal cultural traditions determining the right time, and the wrong time, to do a number of practical tasks. These seasonal determinations varied between nations across Trouwunna. The Coastal Plains women avoided cutting wild iris leaves and making baskets when the flowers were on the plants, and they showed their distaste at a woman for pulling leaves to make baskets during the month of November (Plomley, 1966: 266). The Coastal Plains clanswomen told the visitor in no uncertain terms that her action was not the correct practice and it would make the rains come. Whilst it was acceptable practice in Truganinni's country¹² for collecting

¹² Truganinni belonged to the South East nation where she was a clanswoman of the Port Esperance people.

this particular plant fibre to make baskets in November, it was certainly not the right season for the Coastal Plains women.

On another occasion Mannalargenna objected strongly that a woman from the Big River nation had not followed correct practice by pulling sinew out of a kangaroo tail to make into string, because he believed it would stop the kangaroo from getting fat that season (Plomley, 1966: 564). Her reply to Mannalargenna indicated opposition to the Coastal Plains clan's utterly foreign ways. This situation signifies that physical transplantation from one nation to another does not necessarily equate to cultural transplantation. Like the previous example, the pulling of sinew was seasonally determined possibly by the males, however it was against the clan law and had serious repercussions on the health of the kangaroo. Moreover, just as people belong to a particular country and their traditions are not necessarily portable, it appears that country also determines practice.

1. 1. 6 Rhythms of settlement.

From her archaeological fieldwork, Kee¹³ revealed patterns of habitation that have filled some of the ethnographic gaps recorded by Robinson. She found that there was a greater density of campsites located closer to the coastal margins within one kilometre of the shoreline (Kee, 1987: 53, 69 & 73). Conversely, the number of campsites decreased significantly towards more rugged and inland elevations and densely forested terrain (Kee, 1987: 69). Kee's study supports the view that the clans extensively and intensively exploited areas along the seacoast, behind the coastal dunes and across the adjacent plains. The people lived close to where the women

¹³ Sue Kee carried out extensive archaeological surveys in the northeast, including the lands of the Coastal Plains and Penny Royal Creek clans (North East Tasmania Archaeological Survey, 1987). No recent studies on this scale have been made in the region.

collected their resources, predominately within a thousand metres of the coast, however the men hunted big game on the coastal plains (Plomley, 1966: 250, 52-54, 58, 261 & 374). This is also supportive of the argument above that 'they were never far from the coast at any one time'.

Kee (1987: 60-3) also found that where the living places existed further inland they were higher in density along rivers, creeks and lagoons, with a significant decline in sites found the further the people had to travel away from adequate supplies of fresh water. In her study Kee was able to conclude that the further distance the people had travelled from the seacoast, the more sporadic their visitation, the more temporary their camping places became. She found that the habitation sites in the hinterlands, 'generally reflect short-term transient exploitation [and] temporary campsites utilised by small groups [using] base camps in the hills' (Kee, 1987: 72). Thus, archaeological studies reaffirm that coastal margins and freshwater courses were preferred living places for large family groups with smaller groups occupying inland placescapes intermittently over short periods. These findings suggest that the inland camps were not used by families, and could be associated with men's or women's business. The only known account that may reflect a Trouwunna initiation ceremony involved five men and a young boy of about fifteen being disturbed by a roving party in about 1829 as they slept in a hut. Several of the five clansmen were killed, and the boy who was captured; 'was ornamented with figures on his body' according to John West (Shaw, 1971: 298).¹⁴ Given that this gathering involved a small number of men who were probably conducting an initiation ceremony, it may

¹⁴ I believe that this is the first eye-witness account that can possibly be interpreted as a manhood initiation ceremony in Trouwunna and its significance has not been identified until now.

explain similar use of inland placescapes by the Coastal Plains nation, the traces of which have been identified in Kee's work. There were most likely other reasons for sporadic visits into the hinterlands by small parties of clansmen, which have not been revealed in the ethnographic record.

1. 1. 7 Drawing clan territories.

There have been few attempts at identifying the Coastal Plains territorial boundaries. Ryan's 'tribal' boundaries map (Ryan, 1996: 15-6) for all of Trouwunna nations specifically locates some forty-eight clans mentioned in Robinson's journals. She admits that of all of these locations, those of the 'North East bands [are] uncertain' (Ryan, 1996: 16). However, Ryan's map does not draw clan territorial boundaries. A proposed model to identify the Coastal Plains territories was completed by archaeologist Richard Cosgrove, and Aboriginal Heritage Officer Peter Scotney, in 1983/84 (in Kee, 1987: Appendix 1: Figure 1). Cosgrove and Scotney utilised river catchment basins encompassing the Pipers River, Great Forester River, Tomahawk River, Ringarooma River, Great Mussel Roe River, Ansons River, George River and Scamander River systems (Appendix 2: Map 4). Their model provides us with a good starting point to trace the Coastal Plains territorial boundaries, however, it fails to explain the territories as placescapes. The clanspeople would not have been concerned with the actual source of the water run-off that fed the river systems, as the river catchment divisions show. They would have been associated with the actual river ways.

In their work Cosgrove and Scotney integrated approximate estimations in square kilometres for each territory by nominating an approximate area of seacoast

and hinterlands for each clan. Whilst Ryan offers an approximate area for the total landmass of the Coastal Plains nation, her map fails to identify, or account for, the movement of clans within particular territories (Ryan, 1996: 15), and this omission obscures the cultural dynamics of placescapes. Ryan does however, acknowledge that territorial 'boundaries coincided with marked geographical features like rivers and lagoons' (Plomley, 1996: 11). We know from Kee's archaeological survey work, and Robinson's observations, that the Coastal Plains clanspeople were not static—they utilised wide zones across their country and nation.

When Robinson travelled through the Oyster Bay nation in 1831 he paid particular attention to clan territorial boundaries and realised that they met at the banks of the major rivers (Plomley, 1966: 312). He recognised that the rivers provided plausible physical separations between the different clans as well as distinct borders between neighbouring nations. The river systems are important natural features, as well as the tracts of coastline, hinterlands, and mountain ranges, with which to distinguish and separate clan territories and nation boundaries (Appendix 2: Map 1). Using Robinson's journals Plomley identifies seven clans that made up the Coastal Plains nation. They were Peeberrangner, Leenerreter, Pinterrairer, Pairrebeenne, Pyemmairrenerpairrener, Leenethmairrener and Panekanner (Plomley, 1971: 21). Jones speculates on the possibility of ten clans, and although he does not elaborate on their territories, he bases his argument on calculating the economic capacity of the region to accommodate a certain number of clans (Kee, 1987: 18-9). With Jones and others in mind, the methodology that supports a strong correlation between river catchments and territorial boundaries, convinced Cosgrove and Scotney

of the possibility of there being eight clans. As a result of combining Robinson's Oyster Bay observations and Cosgrove and Scotney's river catchment model, a new map is drawn to accommodate eight clans utilising the major river systems to define the territories (Appendix 2: Map 4). These territories are of approximate size, and they reveal important aspects of cultural dynamics, however although this map is a significant contribution to the body of knowledge, it should be considered as a work in progress.

1. 1. 8 Connections to off-shore islands.

Archaeological surveys of the northeast adjacent islands including Baynes, MacLean and Waterhouse Islands have revealed clan visitation over a period of time (Kee, 1973: 67, 68 & 74-5). These three small islands located within one kilometre of the mainland were within swimming distance from the coast, given the right conditions and aquatic expertise. The more distant islands such as Foster Island and the Georges Rocks group are situated two to four kilometres offshore and would have been difficult to reach by swimming (Kee, 1987: 68 & 76). Many of the above mentioned islands and exposed rocky reefs, were frequented by colonies of seal that were a favoured food to the clans, providing a rich and oily feast when partly cooked (Kee, 1987: Appendix 2). It appears from the remains found in close proximity to the near shore islands, that the clanswomen accessed the closer seal colonies, and transported the carcasses back to their coastal campfires to cook and distribute the food amongst the family (Kee, 1987: 36). However, it is difficult to ascertain whether the more distant seal colonies were visited by the same means.

Waterhouse Island, at the western edge of Ringarooma Bay, is relatively easy to reach by swimming between several rocky islets that are exposed midway from Waterhouse point and the island (Plomley, 1966: 250). The rocky shoreline of Waterhouse Island once teemed with seals and a significant part of the island was covered with muttonbird burrows (Plomley, 1966: 250). Muttonbirds were a highly favoured food resource, and Waterhouse Island would have been visited on a regular basis over many months, between September and April, to gather eggs and harvest adult and juvenile birds. It is likely that a number of Coastal Plains clans gathered near Waterhouse Island to celebrate the bird's return each year and feast on the eggs, adults and juveniles. To the east of Waterhouse Island a number of smaller islands are located hugging the Tebrikunna coastline. On one island is found an excellent source of favoured stone material for making sharp edged cutting and scraping tools (Plomley, 1966:254). On other small islands further to sea, probably outside of safe swimming distance, material for making stone tools has also been found (Kee, 1987: 68). Whether the material on more distant islands was important enough to necessitate the deployment of watercraft technology remains to be answered.

Watercraft were not witnessed being constructed or used by the Coastal Plains people (Plomley, 1966: 389), however this should not negate the possibility that they knew of this technology.¹⁵ The fact that Both Cook and Furneaux did not see watercraft being used in the southeast caused them to believe that these coastal living people lacked the knowledge to construct boats (Plomley, 1983: 192), yet we know

¹⁵ See Julia Clark's map of the distribution of watercraft that reveals three quarters of the island utilised the technology (1986: 34). It is not reasonable to expect that the Coastal Plains people were totally isolated from this technology, and did not know how to make these vessels as Robinson implies (Plomley, 1966: 389).

that they did construct and use large seaworthy catamarans. Likewise, the Coastal Plains nation immediate neighbours to the southeast were skilled at making and using catamarans (Plomley, 1983: 127, 130 & 194), and it is entirely conceivable that the technology was transported across borders, given that information and new ideas were an integral part of cultural transmission across Trouwunna (Flood, 1999: 207).¹⁶ Perhaps a more reasonable explanation as to why Robinson was convinced that the skill was unknown to the Coastal Plains people might be that the clansmen did not have close cultural links to the sea, and this is why they chose not to utilise the technology.

Although Robinson noted that the people collected red ochre on Swan Island (Plomley, 1966: 280), it is not clear whether the source was known prior to the people's banishment to the island in November 1830. Assuming that the ochre source was known to exist prior to 1830, the Pairrebeener clan of Tebrikunna country would surely have accessed this important material if other supplies were not readily available. This being the case watercraft, prior to contact, would have been the only means of safe travel between the mainland and Swan Island. The one convincing factor that the Coastal Plains people did at least know about the construction of catamarans is that in their language they acknowledged the source of plant fibre and materials used for this very purpose. Two words Illibener (ti-tree) and parenerner (long cutting grass) were both identified in the Coastal Plains language as being

¹⁶ Flood (1999: 207) noted the lack of evidence for the earlier invention of watercraft before 4000 years ago and that they were constructed and used when it was necessary to do so, especially to cross wide rivers and distant islands on the west, east, southeast and southwest coasts. She believed that the northeast had 'fewer rivers, bays and offshore islands' which did not necessitate the adoption of this technology. She does not suggest that they did not know how to construct watercraft. However, the location of ochre, mutton-birds and seal on Swan Island may have been overlooked in her assessment.

materials from a particular tree, as well as being their words for plants used to make rope and boats (Plomley, 1976: 346 & 442).¹⁷ These materials, specifically identified by the Coastal Plains people, were identical to those used by the neighbouring Oyster Bay nation, for the construction of their watercraft.¹⁸

An added attraction to undertake sea voyages to Swan Island is the large muttonbird rookery and seal colony found there (Plomley, 1966: 267, 281, 283-84). There is little doubt that women visited the closer islands on a regular basis to collect valuable stone material, harvest muttonbirds and seals, and collect other maritime resources. Those may have been accessed by watercraft rather than by swimming across. After all, Robinson did not see how the women crossed over to the islands nearer the coast and he assumed that they swam across.

* * *

1.2 Spiritual and Ceremonial Life

This section describes the spiritual life of the people of the northeast region and the inter-connections they made between the land, sea and sky. It will consider a number of spiritual beliefs held about their origins, regard for their dead, and the existence of an afterlife. It will select aspects of ceremonial activity, dance and forbidden practices to demonstrate distinctive associations that these people had with their clan country and nation in northeast Trouwunna.

¹⁷ The ti-tree is identified by Cape Portland language for 'tea tree for boats' by Robinson, and is possibly paper bark or swamp ti-tree.

¹⁸ It is speculated that with the movement of people between these two nations sô too could the technological knowledge required for constructing watercraft be transmitted between nations.

1. 2. 1 Spiritual origins and sacred places.

Across Trouwunna the nations developed their own particular spiritual stories, rituals and ceremonial traditions. On the northeast coastal plains the people were spiritually connected to sky (Ryan, 1991: 10). The star, now known as Mars, was the foot of Ancestral Beings who walked across Tonenermuckkellenner and Pullenner¹⁹ (Plomley, 1966: 368) down to Trouwunna to make the people and the landforms. Mannalargenna, bungunna (leader) of the Coastal Plains Pairrebeenne clan (Plomley, 1971: 21),²⁰ conveyed to Robinson his peoples' origins passed on to him by his father. Both people and the Milky Way Galaxy were linked as Mannalargenna retold the story that:

Two stars in the Milky Way, pumpermehowlle and pineterrinner ... made black man [and] gave the people fire ... by rubbing their hands together [they] made the rivers [and] that Mars was the foot and the Milky Way his road [and that] the moon made the sun (Plomley, 1966, 402, 403 & 464).

Mannalargenna tells us the Coastal Plains people had the knowledge of making fire from the very beginning of their existence and that the diversity of landscapes were formed by the same Ancestral Beings who created the people. He tells us the moon was female and the sun was its child (Plomley, 1966: 403). He also confirmed that these beliefs about their origins were passed on from one generation to another.

Regrettably, Robinson did not seek interpretation concerning the spiritual or ceremonial meanings for culturally significant landmarks or placescapes. We therefore learn some things about the Coastal Plains nation's spirituality in

¹⁹ Tonenermuckkellenner is the name for the Black Milky Way and Pullenner is the White Milky Way (Plomley, 1966: 368).

²⁰ This name Pairrebeenne refers to the clan whose territory was Tebrikunna and will be used throughout this dissertation. The other name that has been used for this clan is Trawlwoolway (Plomley, 1971:21).

Robinson's journals, but he records no details regarding the symbolism of natural or created features. Although there is some speculation about the stone arrangements in the Bay of Fires by Flood (1990: 333-34), there is no definitive interpretation about created features such as the engravings on the Blue Tier or naturally formed granitic monoliths such as those found on the Blue Tier, in the Mount Cameron ranges (Plomley, 1966: 286), at Boulder Point, and the significant landmark of Giants Rock (Sloop Rock) in the Bay of Fires.

Found high on the Blue Tiers are geometric engravings deeply incised on boulders of granite, comprising distinctive aligned circles, and found over a wide area (Bednarik *et al*, 2007: 161-70).²¹ The Coastal Plains people most likely conducted significant ceremonial activities of a deeply ritualistic nature closely associated with these petroglyphs (Flood, 1990: 333-34). Their cultural and spiritual meanings remain a mystery as such information relating to them was not recorded or relayed. Perhaps all knowledge had been lost or it may be that these petroglyphs were not shown to Robinson when he was in the area in 1830 and 1831. Although he made a particular point of writing about other celebrated places he did see, Robinson did not record seeing these significant engravings. A naturally formed rock shelter at the very apex of the tier has a commanding panoramic vista of the southern clanlands of the Coastal Plains nation, and would have been an ideal strategic position for

²¹ In a recent article, Robert Bednarik and others remarked that 'The occurrence of aligned cupules is identified as a distinctive characteristic of Tasmanian rock art, and evidence for the ritual use of mountain peaks is recognised for the first time in Australia'. There is also reference to the 'implications of mountain sanctuaries ... to the interpretation of Tasmanian ethnography and cosmology' (Bednarik *et al*, 2007)

surveillance over neighbouring lands (Plomley, 1966: 397).²² As a consequence of the absence of ethnographic data, we rely on speculative interpretation by people such as Flood, Bednarik, and local Aboriginal community members, as they seek to understand the significance of natural and created features in the landscape.

There are also Trouwunna cultural features associated with ceremonial activities located on a cobbled beach in the Bay of Fires (Flood, 1990: 334; Flood, 1999: 208). Above the high waterline stone cobbles have been arranged in similar fashion to those found at many locations around the Trouwunna coast. The stone features incorporate raised pebble cairns and formed shallow pits located adjacent to a flat stone pathway (Kee, 1987: 39). According to Flood the stone arrangements found on many Tasmania coastlines were, 'most likely ... ceremonial sites, used in the course of ritual activities [which] testify to the long-lived traditions, rich artistic and religious life and successful adaptation to a harsh environment' (Flood, 1990: 334 & 343). Flood has linked these stone cobble arrangements with ceremonial activities that are often located along exposed and remote shorelines, thus constituting sites of great spiritual significance.

Robinson saw stone arrangements around Trouwunna and supposed them to be children's playthings (Plomley, 1966: 170), which is a simplified explanation when considering the complexity of these structures. Each boulder was placed and aligned with precision. Some stones were large and heavy enough to require the strength of an adult to move into place. These stone arrangements, similar in form

²² Australia Hill and Mt Michael, on the Blue Tiers, rises to over 800 metres and have panoramic views (Plomley, 1966: 397) overlooking Ben Lomond to the west, Mt Barrow to the northwest and south beyond St Patrick's Head. The rockshelter was used in a recent mortuary ceremony and is now considered a sacred place by the Aboriginal people who attended this celebratory occasion.

and location to those others found around the island, are according to Flood's interpretation, profoundly more purposeful than Robinson's interpretation would suggest. The clanspeople who accompanied Robinson as guides most likely practiced avoidance when asked about places or features that were physical representations of the secret and sacred symbols of their rich artistic and religious life (Kee, 1987: 17). The possibility exists that Robinson's Trouwunnan guides deliberately avoided explanation of these areas, as, of all the information that was shared, sacred associations with the land were not. Their silences speak volumes of the secret and sacred meanings and spiritual connections to places where ceremonies and rituals were conducted.

1. 2. 2 Pathways in the night sky.

The Trouwunnan people had a complex view about their world and how they interacted culturally, socially and spiritually within it. Furthermore, whilst there existed a degree of regional diversity around the island, some practices were common to all nations (Brown, unpublished: 17-9). For example, the night sky was very important to all Trouwunnan peoples. As identified above, the Coastal Plains people claimed they were brought into being by stars who came from the constellations in the Milky Way. Mannalargenna stated that the two stars in the Milky Way made all things including fire, and the people also believed that toowerer, the moon made noiheener the sun (Plomley, 1966: 399, 402-03). In the northeast the clans counted by toowerer, or the lunar cycles, and performed ceremonies associated with cutting and raising cicatrices, applying animal grease and ochre into the cuts, in the crescent shape of toowerer on the back of their legs and bodies (Plomley, 1966: 263). Both these practices were unique to the Coastal Plains clans. They were also aware that

the star systems in the Milky Way galaxy rotated around the night sky (Travers, 1968; 30). Trouwunnan people had complex views, not just of the physical world in which they lived, but the unambiguous and infinite universe above.

Language can be used an indicator of the depth of human understanding of matters tangible and intangible when consideration is given to their linguistic associations. According to Robinson the Coastal Plains clans 'judge by the stars and have names by which they distinguish them' (Plomley, 1966: 300). The arc of the Milky Way was identified in two parts –the Black Milky Way, Tonenermuckkellenner, and the White Milky Way, Pullenner –(Plomley, 1966: 368), are examples of the intricacies and nuances of language. The ability of Trouwunnans to connect with the night sky is remarkable, as they distinguished by name many shining objects that made up the tangible 'white' mass and the intangible 'black' space between as making up this galaxy.

Their close association with the universe presupposes that they not only observed the night sky extensively, they also believed they were at one with it. Their notion of their place in the cosmos was predicated upon the conviction that the mode of being carried out on earth was mirrored by counterparts. That is, their worldly existence extended into the heavens. Shinning lights in the night sky were dynamic and were described as representing spiritual animations of animals and fish, men and women fighting, people hunting, fishing and playing games, some of which, although hemispheres apart, were not dissimilar to the belief systems of the ancient Europeans (Plomley, 1966: 366). They considered the sky with veneration as the source of their origins and a place where many Ancestral Beings dwelt.

The Coastal Plains people were fearful of lightning in the night sky and reacted strongly to the sight of it. Robinson observed the clanspeople covering their eyes and crying out loudly when such lightening displays lit up the night sky. They became 'greatly alarmed ... at the sight of which they shrieked out for some time ... the chief calling out as loud as he could ... [that] they would get sick', if the people as much as acknowledged the lightening (Plomley, 1966: 397 & 405). These 'sparks' were called 'noiheener', which was the same word they gave to the sun. It is therefore understandable why the people feared these spectacular events appearing at night if lightening was somehow connected with a phenomenon that was spiritually associated to the day. The event was probably inexplicably linked to the spirit world. The Coastal Plains people's intimate knowledge of the galaxy and intense interest in its constellations of stars and planets were integral not only to spiritual beliefs and ceremonial activities, but to many aspects of their secular lifestyle too.

1. 2. 3 Islands of the dead.

Archaeological evidence confirms that humans occupied the Furneaux Group of islands in eastern Bass Strait during the period when the islands were connected as a peninsular of the larger continental island landmass to the north (Kiernan *et al*, 1983: 3). People lived on the largest island (Flinders Island) between 6,000 and 4,000 years ago (Flood, 1999: 210). Many larger islands of the Furneaux Group are clearly visible from the northeast coast and highlands and it is therefore puzzling why they were not recently occupied, or visited, by their closest Trouwunna nation. The Furneaux islands, which are about twenty kilometres from the mainland, would have been within reach of the Tebrikunna clan if they wished to utilise substantial

watercraft to island hop across Banks Strait. There is evidence of ocean voyages off the southeast Trouwunnan coast (Flood, 1990: 324-25). It is argued above that the Coastal Plains clans had knowledge of watercraft technology and the materials required to construct them, which poses the question why the Coastal Plains people did not island hop to the large land mass that was clearly visible and within reach when their population reached a point of being unviable?

The landmass to the south of the Furneaux Group was visible from the higher elevations of the islands, and rising smoke from firing the lands on the Trouwunnan mainland would have been also visible, leaving little doubt that people lived to their south. One logical explanation why the eastern Bass Strait islands were not occupied after four thousand years ago was the belief by the Coastal Plains people that their spirits went to stay in the islands when they died (Plomley, 1966: 400). That the islands had spiritual connections with the people offers an explanation as to why they did not make sea voyages to the more distant islands. It is possible that the Coastal Plains clans may have made ocean crossings until four thousand years ago that ceased because of spiritual associations.

The population on Flinders Island, having lived there for several thousand years, either died out as Flood (1999: 210) suggests, or migrated across to the mainland. The surviving Furneaux population may have possessed the technical knowledge to construct watercraft and it was them who introduced the technology to the Trouwunnan people. Many have argued that watercraft was a Trouwunnan invention in the last 2,500 years (Flood, 1990: 324-25), however, knowledge could

have been also introduced through forced, or voluntary migration of the Furneaux people who were suffering demographic stress.

Flood speculates that the Furneaux people were stranded from the mainland when the rising seawaters created the Furneaux Group of islands, and after a consequent 4,000 years of isolation, they died out (Flood, 1999: 210). Her theory does not explain why the Furneaux people died out rather than joining with those to their south on the Trouwunna mainland. The Trouwunnans were isolated by the same global event yet they survived and increased in number. What would have prevented them from island hopping towards their nearest neighbours when the islands between were not too distant to travel by watercraft? Flood also speculates that watercraft were not invented in Trouwunna until about 4,000 years ago (Flood, 1999: 207), which fits in precisely with the cessation of a population in the Furneaux island. Is it therefore possible that Trouwunna watercraft technology was not an invention in isolation but introduced from the outside when the Furneaux population reached Trouwunna shores?

It is conceivable that the stranded Furneaux population practiced the same traditional firing practices to manage land as those on the mainland. Thus, about 4,000 years ago when smoke from firing the islands ceased to be seen by the Coastal Plains clans it may have signalled to the mainland clans that the Furneaux people were all dead. The Coastal Plains story of the dead going to live on the islands could then be directly related to this loss of visual contact. Given that Furneaux Group of islands were where the spirits of the dead resided, the people in the northeast lands may have had no desire to populate the islands, or even to visit them.

1. 2. 4 Revering the dead.

Mortuary practices were diverse amongst the clans in Trouwunna. Some practiced cremation and placed the ashes in elaborate bark tombs (Plomley, 1983: 84; Flood, 1999: 204). On the northeast coast the people practiced several mortuary rites, none of which included cremation. One method was entombment in the hollows of living trees where the deceased was placed upright using brushwood (Plomley, 1987: 245), or spears. Other mortuary practices included burial in coastal sand dunes, horizontal internment under stone alignments, and wrapping the remains in swamp ti-tree bark before burial in swampland (Barrett, 2007, pers. comm., 20 April; Greeno, 1988, pers. comm., 16 April).²³

As discussed above, the Coastal Plains clans believed in the existence of an afterlife in a spirit world on the islands of the dead. The belief in an afterlife was accepted among most of the Trouwunna people and in the spirit life they would ‘jump up white’, or turn into white people when they returned to their country (Roth, 1899: 56–7). The dead were to be revered by the Coastal Plains people and the names of those who had departed the physical world to the spirit world were never mentioned again. One measure of humanity of a civilised society is people’s reverence for and honour of their dead, and judging by the diversity of methods used to dispose of their dead, and the belief in an afterlife, the northeast coast practiced a complex spiritual life.

²³ Remains were wrapped in sheets of bark at a property on the northeast coast. Brian Barrett, who was working with the Lands Department at that time, recalls being told by the landowner that some remains that had been wrapped in sheets of bark were unearthed while excavating a dam. Cheryl Greeno recalls the story of human remains being bulldozed into a dam when she lived at St Helens in the early 1980s. See also Plomley, (1987: 245), Flood, (1999: 278).

1. 2. 5 Ceremony and performance.

The Coastal Plains clans practiced many ceremonial performances, some of which appear to have been uniquely theirs. Along the northeast coast the people were very enthusiastic dancers, often performing around their fires until late into the night (Plomley, 1966: 263, 266 & 278). One of the unusual dances observed involved a large group of between two and three hundred people (Roth, 1899: 140). The performance included men, women and children, who celebrated a successful seal hunting expedition and exchange agreement. The dancers exhibited great exertion and animation that lasted for over an hour (Plomley, 1966: 278). Women demonstrated their skills on the sealing rocks at Eddystone Point, painstakingly imitating the seals at play and their preparation for the kill. They were joined by the children demonstrating their dexterity imitating the women, followed by the men who feigned a fighting contest and proceeded to spear the seal carcasses piled up on the beach (Kee, 1987: 32; Roth, 1899: 140). This celebrated song and dance performance involved all clan members at the gathering and recorded the successful seal hunt followed by a great feast. It is also one of the few examples where all the clan joined in the ceremonial activities, including the children, and it must be seen as a significant event.

When the clans performed in the northeast they usually formed a circle around the fire and sang of their exploits and practiced war movements such as dodging thrown spears. At other times the dancers related amorous stories of courtship and love (Plomley, 1966: 278). Two new dances were introduced to their repertoire in the late 1820s. One celebrated the cunning and dexterous exploits of a

clansman, Tarnebunner, who outran a man on horseback who was in pursuit of the hero while threatening him with a cracking whip. The performance involved several men stooped over with their hands on the back of the other, galloping around the fire with a driver using a bough for a whip who struck the 'horses' to make them go faster. There was also a man imitating a dog running beside the horsemen (Plomley, 1966: 278 & 282). This particular dance demonstrates that new songs and dances were enthusiastically received. They were portrayed in explicit detail providing great entertainment for all who participated and watched.

The other new song and dance routines that the people were most reluctant to relate to Robinson told of them robbing a cart being pulled by bullocks near Port Dalrymple (Georgetown), stealing flour and making damper from the load. They sang of robbing a hut of muskets and concealing them in the bush (Plomley, 1966: 362–63), and Robinson noted that this particular song was popular among the Coastal Plains people. These ceremonial performances relayed not only the stories of ancient times, but also new heroic acts that became part of their celebrations. Their performances were usually conducted at night around the fire, and were very animated with movements replicating the animals, or events, with great vigour. They were important activities as they passed on stories and knowledge through this medium.

* * *

1.3 Traditional Economies and Cultural Customs

This section explores the diversity and range of hunting and gathering places and technological innovations in order to ascertain how they met the needs of the people

as well as their importance to economic survival. It discusses the ways in which the people in the northeast utilised their lands, waterways and seacoast, explains where they lived, how the clans moved across the landscape, their patterns of settlement and activities associated with the different environs. It will reveal the importance of country and place. The section examines land management practices and knowledge of seasonally influenced economies. Further, this section aims to explain divisions of labour between men and women, and the role and status of women in the Coastal Plains society.

1. 3. 1 The birds that circled the moon

Whether the Coastal Plains people had some concept of the great distance that ‘yolla’²⁴ travel as they migrate around the Pacific Ocean is not known. Yolla were available as a food source for up to eight months of the year, and their abundance made it possible for the clanspeople to remain on the coastal plains throughout the year. The ‘moonbirds’,²⁵ as author Patsy Adam-Smith (1965) refers them, return to their nesting rookeries each year from their annual migration to the northern hemisphere summer in the Aleutian archipelago. Their migratory journey ends after 12,000 kilometres²⁶ of circumnavigating the Pacific Ocean when they arrive each spring on the many offshore islands and coastal margins around Trouwunna (Adam-Smith, 1965: 36). The clanswomen watched for the signs of impending arrival of

²⁴ Yolla is an Oyster Bay language name for muttonbird (Plomley, 1976: 152) that has been used in contemporary times by Aboriginal community organisations and individuals.

²⁵ Adams-Smith wrote that the moonbirds were ‘homeless, it is said, since the moon fell off the face of the earth and left them behind’, however she neglected to reference from where she got this information.

²⁶ In March 1947 a muttonbird newly hatched on the Fisher Island scientific station in Franklin Sound (west of the Lady Barron jetty, Flinders Island), was named *Patricia* after the writer of this thesis by the chief scientist Dr Vincent Serventy, and the same bird that was branded with a leg ring returned to the island from the annual migration for at least 26 years.

these incredibly energetic seabirds, later to be known as ‘muttonbirds’,²⁷ that coincided with the flowering season of the ‘lightwood tree’ (Plomley, 1966: 633). As the daylight hours grew longer and the blossoms appeared on the trees, the clanswomen would have anticipated the bird’s return from their journey to the moon and back. Where else could they have gone?

Yolla were integrally linked to the food gathering activities of the clans who encamped along the coast in close proximity to mainland and offshore island rookeries. In flight the adult birds, numbering tens of millions filled the sky and darkened the surface of the sea as Robinson watched when they flew overhead off the coastline of Tebrikunna in 1830 (Plomley, 1966: 255). The adult birds arrive each September to prepare their burrows for egg laying. Then in late November the egg season provided an abundance of eggs, laid by birds without burrows over the open ground, that were collected by the clanswomen in great numbers (Commonwealth Schools Commission: 1986; Plomley, 1966: 280-83). The women also gathered large quantities of adult birds over late spring and early summer (Plomley, 1966: 281-83). Yolla are long lived and may have travelled in their lifetime a comparative distance to the moon and back after several decades of migrating around the Pacific Ocean. One can imagine that the sight of many millions of yolla in flight would have inspired ceremonial song, dance and story telling, to announce the arrival, and continued abundance, of these incredible seabirds. Starting with adult birds and surplus eggs and followed by the fledglings, the clans were

²⁷ The muttonbird, or short tailed shearwater (*Puffinus tenuirostris*), is a species of petrel (Plomley, 1976: 151–152; Brothers *et al*, 2001: 611)

provided with a highly nutritious and oil-rich economic resource from mid spring until late autumn.

1. 3. 2 Keeping country alive.

Throughout Trouwunna the people revitalised landscapes and replenished economic resources over many thousands of years by burning the landscape in mosaic patterns (Plomley, 1966: 248). This practice encouraged regrowth on the hunting grounds and kept the lands open for ease of travel and hunting (Plomley, 1983: 203). Extensive firing of the lands along the northeast coast was sighted by a number of early maritime visitors to Trouwunna, commencing with Tobias Furneaux, in March 1772 (Plomley, 1983: 202). Those who saw the vast columns of smoke from the sea were convinced that there were large numbers of people living in the region. Furneaux was so impressed by the extent of these fires along the sweeping coastline that he named the bight 'Bay of Fires'.

Thirty years after Furneaux two French ships travelled close to the east and northeast coastline, and the crews again remarked on the extent of fires and smoke that they saw stretching from the Bay of Fires to Waterhouse Point, and eastward towards the Tamar River (Plomley, 1983: 144). The French commented: 'we would have called it the Bay of Fires too if it had not already had this name' (Plomley, 1983: 140). These sightings in 1802/3 depicted the whole of the northeast lands being fired and their observations testified not only that the Coastal Plains clansmen were occupied with managing their lands in an intense fashion, but also that there were significant numbers living throughout the Coastal Plains nation

In November 1798, Matthew Flinders and George Bass made landfall near Waterhouse Island in their small boat whilst on the first leg of their circumnavigation of Van Diemen's Land. They were attracted ashore by smoke from fresh made fires and approached a clansman burning off coastal vegetation (Kee, 1987: 15). It appears that this practice of firing the land was the provenance of the men as there is no ethnographic record of women firing the land.

Further, the responsibility of carrying the lighted torches and lighting the scrub and grasslands may have been allocated to particular males of status. An example of this is suggested by a small group of Coastal Plains clanspeople, including Mannalargenna, who were taken into exile on Swan Island by Robinson on November 4, 1830. Robinson records that the people who had returned from Oyster Bay lands had seen smoke signals that told them their countryman Timmy (Timme) was with the group (Plomley, 1966: 283).²⁸ It is possible that Timmy had the responsibility of lighting signal fires, otherwise how would they have predicted that he was with this group? Furthermore, sketches by Thomas Bock depicting clansmen carrying lighted firebrands may have symbolised men's business in Trouwunnan society (Plomley, 1965: 7 & 9). Bock depicts Mannalargenna and Timmy, the former being a powerful bungunna with ochred hair, and the latter a younger man also with ochred hair, each holding a lighted firebrand (Plomley, 1965: 7 & 9). Although there was a vast difference between their ages—Mannalargenna was about sixty and

²⁸ It is presumed that this was the smoke seen by the small group of six clanspeople who were returning from Oyster Bay and these were return smoke signals that were made by Timme who was on Swan Island. Smokes were seen over several days from both the mainland and Swan Island as the travellers approached the coast opposite the island. Eventually a boat was sent across to the mainland to pick up the second group who were taken across to Swan Island on November 15. Robinson did not return from his trip to the Furneaux Group until November 15, 1830. However, he wrote that he had seen the smokes as he approached Clarke Island on November 14 (Plomley, 1966: 273-74).

Timmy about eighteen—they were both Pairrebeenne clansmen. It is therefore possible that not only was firing and managing the lands the business of men, it may also have been the provenance of a select few who were, or would become, bungunnas who carried the firebrands.

Fire was a vital technology that allowed the clans to manage their territorial lands, and in doing so manage the fauna and flora, by keeping the important hunting corridors open across the wide coastal plains. Mosaic burning patterns encouraged regrowth of grasslands. These were interspersed with small copses of scrub that were planned to provide ideal habitats for animals and birds (Plomley, 1966: 248, 250, 252, 254, 380, 385 & 388). This regular burning pattern was deliberate, rotational, and planned in advance, to ensure the reliability and productivity of wild plants and animals over many seasons into the future. Managing their lands through the use of fire was the clan's assurance that their country would provide an economic abundance in return for their efforts. It was also the traditional way of caring for country through regeneration to keep it clean and healthy.

Likewise, the use of fire as a technology assisted clans to create ideal environments that suited their customary interaction with country. Robinson stated this as he walked across the northeast plains in 1830:

This part of the country had been fresh burnt by the natives and the whole of this day's walking was exceedingly good, the best that I had experienced [and] All the country fifteen miles inland from the coast had been burnt and is good hunting ground. [It exhibits] a delightful park-like appearance (Plomley, 1966: 380 & 385).

Robinson may not have fully appreciated that this fired landscape had been shaped and managed over thousands of years, not to create parkland as he supposed, (for

recreational or aesthetic purposes) but for the renewal and continuity of economic resources that were essential to the survival of the people who belonged to it. Furthermore, there was more to the use of fire than as a tool to modify and regenerate the placescapes.

Smoke signals were used as an invitation for outsiders to safely approach clan gatherings. This practice was described by James Kelly in 1816 as a 'promise' of a friendly meeting. Kelly also noticed that three smokes was a gesture of farewell (Roth, 1899: 84). It was shown by Mannalargenna that fire was an important part of the belief system in the northeast by his attaching of lighted firesticks onto the trunks of trees to ward off evil spirits who were responsible for bringing unwelcome strong winds, and the heavy rains, to the region (Plomley, 1966: 260 & 404). Robinson considered such actions as superstitious nonsense and did not appreciate or attempt to understand the serious consequences of high winds and heavy rains to the clanspeople. Robinson seemed not to comprehend that the physical and spiritual world was intertwined and, in this instance, fire was no doubt the medium used to appease the spirit world. Again, when Robinson witnessed Mannalargenna use a firebrand to stop the wind or to ward off evil spirits for entering a camping place, it was treated with contempt (Plomley, 1987: 244). Different stories of the origins of fire were told throughout the island (Plomley, 1966: 399 & 641), most believing it came from the Ancestral Beings as a gift. Although all of the clans knew how to strike fire, a smouldering firebrand was often carried as the clans travelled for protection against bad spirits and immediate use for cooking and warmth at the end of

their journey. The value of this essential technology was of immense importance, in both the physical and spiritual worlds, of the people of Trouwunna.

1. 3. 3 Economic abundance and diversity.

Robinson's observations in 1830/31 provided important and detailed description of northeast landscapes and resources. His journals identified the existence of extensive grasslands and lightly wooded plains as far as the eye could see (Plomley, 1966: 250, 52, 380 & 388). Clansmen assiduously hunted the large game animals such as forester kangaroo, emu, wombats and wallaby that inhabited the extent of the coastal plains (Plomley, 1966: 264; Cosgrove, 1990: 23). The flightless Trouwunna emu, which fed off the wild cranberry fruits (Plomley, 1966: 258), was numerous across the open northeast plains, and a favoured target of the Coastal Plains hunters. The hens produced seven to eleven large eggs during late autumn, with young birds at their best to eat when they reached about the size of turkeys (Plomley, 1966: 425; Nicholls, 1977: 82). Nests of large emu eggs no doubt provided a welcome contribution to the diet when muttonbird eggs were not available at that time of the year, and the swan-egging season was not until the heavy rains arrived between midwinter to early summer. The men managed their lands to encourage new growth and create open spaces for selective hunting across the coastal plains.

Robinson was impressed with extensive grassy plains and heath-lands he surveyed at Tebrikunna, around Latewongener,²⁹ near Leengtanner,³⁰ and further west to the plains of Routeelitter,³¹ (Plomley, 1966: 945-61). At these particular places the clansmen demonstrated their hunting prowess, tracking and spearing the large game,

²⁹ Mt Cameron East Range

³⁰ Tomahawk River

³¹ Waterhouse Point

while the women moved into the wooded areas to trap numerous small game, collect bird's eggs, and gather a variety of edible roots, fruits, fungi and medicinal plants (Clark, 1986: 19 & 55). The edible flora included 'Kangaroo apples' (Cameron, 2000: 88) that grew to the size of plums, hung in clusters and were eaten when they ripened to a rich orange colour. Smaller fruits and berries included wild cranberries (Harris *et al*, 2001: 111), native currents, native cherries (Cameron, 2000: 19, 82 & 104) and 'canygong' or native pig face (Harris *et al*, 2001: 129). All were collected and carried in tightly woven bags. The young shoots of 'yakka', or xanthorrhoea (Cameron, 2000:19, 112, 285), were cut from the plants and 'black man's bread' was dug from the ground and roasted on coals. Tree fern pith was also a favoured food, as was the fleshy parts of sweet rush, water leeks (Plomley, 1966: 250) and other sedges.

An extensive archaeological survey of the northeast by Kee confirms Robinson's 1830/31 observations of a rich and bountiful economy. Kee states that 'Abundant marine, estuarine, lagoon, swamp and terrestrial food resources are provided in the coastal environs of the northeast' (Kee, 1987: 13-4; Plomley, 253 & 258). Large quantities of seafood, harvested by the women, included favourites such as crayfish, 'muttonfish',³² large whelks, oysters, 'wairreners',³³ mussels and oysters (Kee, 1987: 50). Seafood was also an important source of iodine that contributed to the clan's health and wellbeing. The women had favourite collecting rocks on the coast as the men had favoured hunting grounds inland.

³² Muttonfish is now known as abalone.

³³ Wairreners are large sea snails.

The marshlands and lagoons were perfect habitats for many estuarine birds, eels, and giant freshwater lobster 'which is excellent eating. The natives are fond of this fish' (Plomley, 1966: 719). These highly favoured foods were gathered by the clanswomen who had intimate knowledge of the most economically productive locations and seasonal availability of the chosen harvest. The women timed their food gathering expeditions accordingly so as to provide the clan with a change in diet that peaked and waned with the gathering seasons (Plomley, 1966: 254, 256, 382 & 399). Therefore, the range of foods found in the northeast territorial lands and seas provided the clans with bountiful harvests and a rich and balanced diet throughout the year, and as a result they were strong and healthy. Robinson described the group he met on 29 August 1831 as being 'fine young men, stout made' (Plomley, 1966: 415), indicating that they were fit, athletic and healthy.

1.3.4 Sheltered living places.

In the northeast region shelters were constructed of interwoven sheets of bark that had been chopped and pulled in long strips from peppermint gumtrees (Plomley, 1966: 261 & 410) using heavy stone axes. This process would have required strength and stamina to detach the material in long sheets and carry it to the nearby camping place. The structure was completed only after boughs were placed in the ground to form a half domed shape and secured by interweaving the frame with sheets of bark (Plomley, 1966: 410). One of the largest huts in the Trouwunnan context was situated in the lower reaches of the Great Forester River. It measured eleven metres long, and according to Robinson, was capable of sheltering between thirty and forty people (Plomley, 1966: 410).

Enclosed huts were also found near Mt William, and several were placed at the base of Mt Cameron East, all of which were strongly built and substantial. Some were found in groups, whilst others were singular structures (Plomley, 1966: 253, 261, 285-86). These dwellings were situated away from the coast along riverbanks, in the foothills of mountain ranges, around lagoons and beside wetlands, and more often located in the vicinity of swan rookeries (Plomley, 1991: 38-9). When Robinson was in the area in 1830 he saw some very old huts in some locations and others that had been recently constructed and utilised. It is evident that these structures were not built at random, but placed at specific places importantly close to women's economic resources, and the sites of their social and ceremonial activities. It makes sense that the huts were in the locations associated with the women because they were needed to care for the children who would not have been able to walk long distances to gather foods. There were some artefact scatters and signs of sporadic occupation located by Kee (1987: 75) on the inland plains but these were probably associated with men's hunting excursions. The precise locations of these substantive dwellings were known to the clanspeople. They were usually kept in good repair for immediate shelter from wet and cold weather and in times of mosquito infestations.

The other type of dwelling found along the coastal margins were open fronted and crescent shaped (Clark, 1986: 26), and were of lighter construction than the more robust bark huts that were located further inland. These lean-to structures were utilised as shelters from the prevailing winds along the warmer and more sheltered bays of the seacoast, whilst the enclosed huts were suited to inland living spaces for protection from the rain and cooler conditions (Plomley, 1966: 260-61). Both open

fronted and enclosed types of structures were employed by the Coastal Plains people to suit environmental conditions, for the comfort and convenience primarily for the women and children, but nevertheless used by all members of the clan.

1. 3. 5 Women's role and status in clan society.

In the Coastal Plains society the role and status of females was distinct from males. This was evident in the skills required for a range of economic tasks. The clanswomen were the main economic providers for their families, and many gathering and collecting tasks they claimed as their own (Plomley, 1966: 280; Roth, 1899: 68). They considered it their business to gather the firewood (Plomley, 1991: 15; Plomley, 1966: 280) and were renowned for their strength and skills as superior swimmers and divers (Plomley, 1966: 253-54 & 267). Braving the cold, often turbulent and shark infested waters, the women remained submerged for long periods of time to harvest marine resources so important to daily dietary requirements (Plomley, 1966, 267). They could swim long distances to the closer offshore islands and rocky outcrops to harvest oil rich seal and mutton-birds and to collect fine quality tool making stone (Kee, 1987: 67-8). Along the coastal margins numerous varieties of shellfish, sea mammals and sea birds were gathered as favoured foods to complement the land harvested foodstuffs.

Moreover, as competent collectors of plants and small animals, the women's economic gathering domain encompassed the seacoast, wetlands, heathlands and woodlands, mainly along the river systems. Their tool kit was limited to essential items required to carry out a range of skilful tasks. Some of these they carried for everyday use, including stone knives and scrapers, wooden chisels and digging sticks,

fibre and skin bags, lengths of rope and string, skin cloaks as well as rugs for carrying young babies and for every day use (Clark, 1986: 23).³⁴ Collection bags were woven out of fibrous plants, or fashioned out of skins, to carry produce and material items of importance (Plomley, 1966: 219 & 900). The women accomplished many roles that often required arduous physical effort and skills such as constructing bark huts and shelters, collecting and carrying firewood, collecting and preparing ochre and nurturing the children (Plomley, 1966: 531, 904-05; Cosgrove, 1990: 23). They prepared animal skins (Plomley, 1966: 900) for many applications including mats and sleeping covers, carrying wraps for babies, bags for implements, cloaks, footwear, carrying bags, and strips for body ornamentation.³⁵ Most of these tasks were claimed as theirs alone and were probably considered as being outside the interest or ability of males.

The Coastal Plains women shared an important role, along with their counterparts throughout Trouwunna, of having absolute provenance over the collection and distribution of ballawine, or red ochre (Plomley, 1966: 904-05; Sagona, 1994: 117 & 154). The women made and utilised two implements to obtain the ochre and prepare it for use. A short chisel type tool was made to dig the red ochre and a stone was prepared for grinding the material (Plomley, 1966: 904-05). This material was revered and eagerly sought after by both men and women who applied the ochre to their bodies for warmth and waterproofing. Ochre was also

³⁴ Heavier items of stone cores, ochre and tools such as grinding stones and mallets were usually left at camping sites for future use.

³⁵ Robinson noted that '[T]he skin they prepared for the purpose of packing red ochre in. (The women) have been preparing skins for this purpose for some time past'. Robinson watched a brush kangaroo being chased and killed by a dog and the skin taken 'for moccasins but leaving the carcass' (Plomley, 1966: 288 & 900). Also see Mickleborough regarding the use of skins and lengths of sinew for sewing skins together (2004: 80), and Plomley (The Westlake Papers, no date: 38), who recorded that Henry Beeton saw skin bags made out of kangaroo pockets tied up with grass fibre string.

valued as a cultural resource in ceremonial activities as well as for everyday use (Sagona, 1994: 117-18). Thus the role of women procuring and distributing red ochre is indicative of the status and responsibility they carried. The women also carried and maintained sacred objects containing the remains of their dead relatives for healing and ritual purposes (Plomley, 1966: 266). This combined role as keepers of revered objects and ochre was significant as ceremonial activities and rituals were of paramount importance to Trouwunnan life. It may be that the men deliberately avoided touching the red material until the ochre was processed to a powder and any human remains were covered over with cordage or animal skin.

The knowledge of collection, preparation and stringing shells on sinew, skin or string, was also the provenance of clanswomen. Strings of shells were worn as body ornamentation (Plomley, 1983: plate VIII), however their circular form may also have had deeper symbolic meaning. Robinson suggested that the cicatrices cut into the body in the form of circles were associated with the sun and moon, and he also remarked in regards to painted circles on bark that in the Big River country, 'Those circles are emblematical devices of men and women' (Plomley 1966: 543-81). Like the ochre, the circles of shells were highly prized as items for reciprocal exchange or gift giving between clans on the seacoast and those inland (Plomley, 1966: 257). The tradition goes back into the deep past—at least 1800 years (Flood, 1999: 204)—and confirms the long cultural practice by women on the seacoast who collected and made the strings of shells. The strings of shells were not just prized for their beauty, but also because their value as a highly sort after item of trade would have contributed to the women's status as the makers.

Clanswomen were physically strong and tenacious, unafraid to climb to great heights, carried heavy loads, and zealously claimed many of their daily tasks as being their domain alone. They took great pride in their skills, roles and status as valuable members of clan society, and although they were primarily concerned with survival of the clan on a daily basis, they were also significant providers to the clan's economic, physical and spiritual wellbeing.

1.3.6 Clan marriage customs.

As the clans did not inter-marry, the usual practice was for agreements to be made between the nations. The couples would then go away into the bush and 'enjoy charms' and return as husband and wife (Plomley, 1966: 888). Robinson noted that it was usual practice for the wife to go to their husband's clan, although rarely the man went to the wife's clan. It was critical to nurture alliances and honour reciprocal obligations through the exchange of women in marriage. There was a long-standing agreement for the exchange of women between the Stoney Creek nation and Coastal Plains nation. However, by the late 1820s there appeared to have been a breakdown in these alliances that had led to raiding attacks on the Stoney Creek peoples for women by the Coastal Plains clansmen (Plomley, 1966: 254). Both methods, that of exchange and raiding, to acquire women for marriage were practiced throughout Trouwunna. In 1831, Mannalargenna relayed to Robinson that his warriors had recently conducted a foray into Big River country to fight their enemies and steal women (Plomley, 1966: 263). This long distance trek into hostile territory, demonstrated that cultural raiding forays were not restricted to close neighbours, and the clansmen were prepared to put their lives at great risk to obtain women. An act of

aggression against an enemy often ended with the abduction of women, and was, according to the triumphant victors, celebrated as a great and honourable achievement. It also demonstrates that the custom of stealing women, rather than acquisition through reciprocal exchange, was the usual method of acquiring women between nations who were estranged. This method also allowed the young men to test their strength and bravery against the enemy.

The relationship between couples testing their compatibility as potential partners was witnessed in 1830, and to an outsider it must have been a remarkable sight. This practice of courtship was observed on Swan Island. Robinson noted, 'that they cut the women with knives.'³⁶ Tonight was another scene of confusion, the men running after the women with stone knives in their hands and the women running away' (Plomley, 1966: 280). Several days later Robinson noted that there had been several marriages agreed to between some of the clanspeople who were exiled on Swan Island (Plomley, 1966: 285. It is highly likely that one of these agreed unions was between Mannalargenna and Tanleboneyer, who was from the Oyster Bay nation, as they were mentioned as being husband and wife soon after.

* * *

In Conclusion to Chapter one

The people of the northeast region of Trouwunna were quintessentially coastal plain dwellers, living much of the time within one kilometre of the seacoast. They built substantial huts and temporary shelters along the seacoast and lowland river systems,

³⁶ The courtship of 'cutting the women' may well have been exaggerated by Robinson as he saw them as acts of cruelty whereas they may well have been symbolic acts to claim a woman in marriage and not meant to inflict injury.

and did not live in the highlands. What is now described as the Coastal Plain country was divided into at least eight related families or clans who shared a distinctive language, and each clan belonged to a territory that was defined by borders of rivers and seacoast. The clanspeople of this country were linked by a singular intersecting corridor, or walking path, that skirted each clan's southern boundary, was clearly distinguished and extended from Georges Bay to Pipers River.

The clanspeople practiced a way of life that clearly delineated between the roles of men and women. The men were specialised hunters of big game and managers of their lands, modifying the vast inland plains using fire to keep open and replenish the environment for ease of travel and hunting. They were the custodians of clan laws that determined social interactivity. The men defended their people in times of conflict and their territorial lands from intrusion by outsiders.

Women managed the resources they harvested along the seacoast, river margins, estuaries and woodlands and provided the majority of dietary needs for the clan. They were the custodians of ochre and keepers of sacred amulets used for religious and ceremonial activities. The women determined what, where and when to harvest an extensive range of resources, and were responsible for and guided flexible movement between living places. There were two methods of acquiring women in marriage: one was by way of reciprocal exchange, the other was through raiding and abduction. When reaching marriageable age the women moved to their husband's country to follow the cultural rules of their new clan, however, they did not forget their birth country. The women harmonised their cultural practices with

seasonal changes as flexible hunters, gatherers and fishers, and nurturers of the children.

The Coastal Plain people saw themselves deeply connected to all the elements of their environment including the land and sky. They held that their origins were linked to the stars and planets, and counted and planned ceremonial events by the phases of the moon. They revered their dead and believed in the existence of an afterlife. Clans celebrated their stories through song, dance, and ritual, some of which were uniquely theirs. The Coastal Plain clanspeople belonged to country as it belonged to them.

Chapter Two: Portraits of the Colonial Sea Frontier of Eastern Bass Strait

This chapter investigates the range of maritime activities that took place at the colonial sea frontier of Bass Strait between 1798 and 1820. It is organised into three major sections. The first section is 'Phase One: Colonial Sealing Ventures— 1798 to 1810'. The second is 'Escapees, Bandits and Desperadoes', and the third section is 'Phase Two: Seal Hunting— 1810 to 1820'. The aim of the chapter is to investigate two distinct phases of sealing operations in eastern Bass Strait in order to understand the lifestyles of those engaged in the operations and to reveal the character of the men who were involved in this part of the straits over the period of two decades. The intention is to trace the timeline of events that led up to the arrival of the men who became permanent settlers on islands in the Furneaux Group.

2.1 Phase One: Colonial Sealing Ventures—1798 to 1810

This section investigates the involvement of maritime activities in the eastern Bass Strait region during this period. It explains the importance of sealing as it emerged as the first colonial enterprise of New South Wales. The section aims to give a detailed description of the sealing industry and the lifestyle of the men who worked on the sealing grounds in eastern Bass Strait.

2.1.1 Sealing as a commercial enterprise

The first colonial export commodity emerged with the discovery of large colonies of seals in the small islands around eastern Bass Strait. Trade of sealskins and oil

became Port Jackson's major commercial enterprise, along with boat building, ships chandlery and associated maritime ventures (Cumpston, 1973: 13) that provided employment opportunities for men 'free of incumbrance' (*Sydney Gazette*, 1804 & 1805).³⁷ The range of associated seafaring occupations for the new colony included boatmen, carpenters, seamen, sealers, cooks, labourers, coopers, stewards, and foremen. The sealing industry provided the catalyst for the fledgling colony to emerge out of the darkness of convictism into a busy centre of trade and commerce (Stevens, 1965: 308). Opportunities for employment in the new colony for ex-convicts were limited and the maritime industry offered an attractive proposition to men who had survived the harsh penal system.

Although cereal crops were cultivated around Sydney Town it became clear that grain and other agricultural produce were not appropriate export commodities that would assist the spreading colonial outpost to become less reliant on subsistence from Britain (Hainsworth, 1972: 128). Consequently, during those decades colonial commercial enterprise was not founded on a land-based export economy, or on a sheep's back, but the wealth of the seal (Adam-Smith, 1978: 17). The incentive for a small number of Port Jackson merchants with the vision to invest in shipbuilding and to exploit the seal fishery, was to not only take advantage of this fledgling industry, but to also accumulate wealth (Nicholls, 1977: 429). Fortunately, the early governors recognised the advantage of commercial enterprise and provided support by permitting the engagement of men, mostly ex-convicts, to work in the fishery

³⁷ See newspaper advertisements placed throughout two years when recruitment for sealers was at its highest (*Sydney Gazette*, 22 & 29 July, 1804, 6 January, 1804, 30 September, 1804, 18 October, 1804, 11 November 1804, 16 & 23 December, 1804, 6 January 1805, 21 February, 1805, 18 March, 1805, 10 May 1805, 1 September, 1805).

(Nicholls, 1977: 429). Products obtained from maritime exploitation were financed primarily by ex-convicts who utilised entrepreneurial cunning to become the first merchants to export produce from the colony. The first phase of seal fishery expanded with the deployment of many small to medium sized colonial owned and built ships out of Port Jackson (Hainsworth, 1972: 132-34 & 143). This lucrative trade in sealskins coincided with an expansion of an important fur market in Europe and Asia driven by the global need for good quality leather for footwear and the conversion of fur to felt for clothing and headwear (Hainsworth, 1972: 131). The fledgling colony experienced growth, credited to these men with entrepreneurial vision, through the maritime industry and associated fur trade.

The discovery in 1798 of a passage through Bass Strait opened up an important shipping route between Europe, Asia and the colonial outpost of New South Wales. This narrow seaway provided for an east/west passage from the Southern Ocean across the Pacific to the Americas, and north/south movement for colonial shipping between the Tamar and Derwent Rivers and Port Phillip Bay (Stokes, 1846b: 445). The eastern seaboard of the new continent and Bass Strait were extremely busy seaways and continued to be the most significant throughout colonial times (Stokes, 1846b: 445). Continuous billowing canvas sails would have been visible along the extent of coastline as vessels travelled the sea routes between the colonial ports of Van Diemen's Land and Port Jackson, and into the sealing grounds in Bass Strait.

2. 1. 2 Early colonial sea frontier—1798 to 1810.

The first colonial sealers were seamen who accompanied Captain Bishop's sealing expedition to Bass Strait, with Kent Bay (Appendix 2, map 5) chosen as the preferred location for their base camp (Cumpston, 1973: 8-11). Bishop had the good fortune of being in Port Jackson when George Bass and Matthew Flinders returned to the port from Bass Strait and re-affirmed the existence of vast colonies of seals around the Furneaux Group of islands (Cumpston, 1973: 8). The two navigators had also surveyed the southern Cape Barren island coastline, noting the tides and charting navigation channels through the small island passages on their voyage, thus their knowledge of the area provided invaluable maritime information to Bishop and his crew.

With a crew of fourteen, Bishop accumulated nine thousand seals, amounting to two hundred a day, in two months averaging a daily tally of harvesting ten seals per man (Roe, 1967: 294-95). Bishop found that the fur seals were in greater numbers within fifteen nautical miles return trip to the chosen Kent Bay base camp, which meant that his crew had a long haul to transport the carcasses from the sealing rocks to base camp, for processing the skins and oil. Bishop described the skins as being of prime quality and expected them to fetch a high price on the London market. The colonial sealers who followed in Bishop's wake were to continue to select the seals for their quality skins and highest marketability (Roe, 1967: 294).

The laborious nature of rowing a small dinghy to the sealing grounds and killing amongst the mayhem of the moving mass of large, panicking mammals, was

not for weaklings (A Big Country, 1975; Douglas, 1986).³⁸ Excessive energy and alertness was required to complete the tasks and return to base camp. The sealing gangs who came to the straits during the first phase of seal harvesting and processing, followed Bishop's example, employing the same methods of working from the Kent Bay.

The colonial sea frontier extended southward from Sydney Town into the tempestuous waters of Bass Strait. Merchant ships, engaged to transport the sealing crews into Bass Strait, sailed along the southern shores of Cape Barren Island. Their final destination was reached when the sea captains navigated into the sheltered waters of Kent Bay (Cumpston, 1973: 16). On board the vessels were gangs of men, under the charge of a gang boss, who were engaged to hunt and process seals for their valuable by-products. There were probably many reasons why men from Sydney Town, responded to the newspaper advertisements and chose to go on these sealing expeditions, including their 'desire to get away from wives or family' (Hainsworth, 1972: 143). Hainsworth remarked, 'Unquestionably some men embarked with an enthusiasm bolstered by ignorance of the conditions they were to encounter' (Hainsworth, 1972: 143). To many, enticements to undertake seasonal work in the straits as promoted in the colonial newspapers were probably seen inviting to an adventure compared with the available options in the colony, there was probably little hesitation by ex-convicts who were eligible for a clearance from the colonial authority to work in the sealing grounds. The reality of this quest for

³⁸ In order to have some indication of the conditions experienced by the early sealers, the use of images of contemporary seal hunting expeditions on the sealing grounds in the northern hemisphere can be gained from pictures in videos such as A Big Country 'Flinders Preserve', 1975; Malcolm Douglas, 'Bass Strait Adventure with Malcolm Douglas', 1986.

adventure was often more sobering when they reached the straits and experienced the appalling conditions of life on the sealing grounds. Their one consolation was that their stay lasted one season after which time they would return to their homeport.

The men were predominately ex-convicts, who having served their sentences, became collectively known as sealers.³⁹ There were many advertisements placed in the colonial newspapers by the Sydney Town merchants that called for seamen, sealers, land men and headmen. Boys from the age of 10 to 14 years were indentured for three to five years as crews of colonial ships (*Sydney Gazette*, 29, July: 1804; 30 September: 1804; 18 October: 1804; 24 December: 1804; 6 January: 1805; 10 May: 1805; 1 September, 1805).

At the end of the voyage to Bass Strait many of the men were to see seal colonies, and be associated with the harvest and processing of seals, for the first time. From as early as 1797 the potential for wealth from seal skins and oil was realised (Cumpston, 1973: 4-5). Both species, the hair and fur seal, congregated in large colonies across eastern and western Bass Strait, although the fur of those in the eastern islands was of superior quality (Cumpston, 1973: 9). Their more robust cousins the elephant seal preferred the waters around western Bass Strait. They were pursued primarily for their vast stores of oil, and their tongues which were salted and sold for a high price (Cumpston, 1973: 16 & 59). The men who arrived in the straits were to face a range of labour intensive tasks including killing, skinning and processing the skins and carcasses. This required enormous stamina and courage.

³⁹The terms 'sealers' or 'The Sealers' are used to describe the men who worked on a seasonal basis during the first phase of the seal fishery operations between 1798 and 1810.

After discharging the gangs and their seasonal supplies ashore at Kent Bay base camp, the ships sailed out of Banks Strait leaving behind the men to work in the sealing grounds for the season, a period lasting between four and five months (Cumpston, 1973: 9-14). By the beginning of the nineteenth century an ever-increasing number of colonial built wooden vessels were engaged at season's end to pack up the gangs of men, along with the precious cargo of processed skins and oil. The constant presence of sailing ships in the eastern straits throughout the first phase of seal fishery operations, from 1798 to 1810, occurred because of the existence of large numbers of prime seals occupying the majority of rocky shores, reefs and promontories (Begg and Begg, 1979: 57). Men and boys, as young as ten from the colony of New South Wales, were engaged to work on the ships, small dinghies and around the base camp processing operations (*Sydney Gazette*, 1 September: 1805). The young boys employed in the industry were probably given the monotonous jobs of cutting pegs, drying skins, collecting firewood, and keeping the trying pots boiling. We can imagine the labour intensive lifestyle of the men in the sealing grounds and the hard life for young boys.

The seals gathered on the rocks and beaches, forming into large colonies each year between November and May, which were 'the most productive' months (Cumpston, 1973: 12; Ryan, 1996: 66). It was during and after the calving season that the sealers were most active, over long daylight hours, killing the adult and juvenile seals when the skins were in the best condition, or as they were called 'at their prime' (Cumpston, 1973: 68). When the seals were most numerous, the men could be more selective as they moved among the colony seeking those animals with

prime skins (Cumpston, 1973: 6),⁴⁰ rather than killing indiscriminately. The operational crews were large with between twenty and thirty men making up each gang (*Sydney Gazette*, 12 February, 1804; *Sydney Gazette*, 10 May, 1805), with a total of up to several hundred engaged to work in the straits each season. The land-based crews had to work efficiently, with men and boys organised under a leading hand to process the daily harvest. Base camp at Kent Bay was, beyond doubt, a hive of organised human activity throughout the first phase of sealing. The Sydney Town 1804 census, that determined one hundred and twenty three men were in Bass Strait, is an indication of the intensive labour required (Hainsworth, 1972: 140; Murray-Smith, 1973: 169). This figure probably equated to between four to five gangs, of up to thirty men in each, working in the straits during the 1804 season. With the sheer number of men working in close proximity, we can imagine the fierce competition between the gangs as they manoeuvred to reach the sealing grounds first to get the greatest share, and best selection of the kill.

A large land area to operate base camp was required in order to provide room where four to five separate gangs could process their skins and render the carcasses. Each gang pegged out up to a hundred and forty skins per day, which necessitated an effective land-based camp rather than the confines of ships, or the confines of smaller islands. Kent Bay proved to be an ideal location to set up a land based operation, with plenty of wood and water (Cumpston, 1973, 22). The base camp was in close proximity to the seal colonies and, having been surveyed for safe sailing passage, provided sheltered anchorage in most weather conditions (Cumpston, 1973: 22).

⁴⁰The best skins were fetching twenty-five shillings on the London market (Cumpston, 1973: 6).

Further, the base camp was in close proximity to the southern entrance into Banks Strait and on a direct route to Port Jackson. Sealing operations throughout the first phase continued the mode of operations established by Captain Bishop in 1798.

2. 1. 3 Men of good character.

Although the majority of first colonial Port Jackson voyage-sealers had survived an earlier life under a cruel colonial penal system, they were to experience great hardship living in the remoteness of the Furneaux Group. The need was to have men who were 'sober, [and] steady [and who] must be unincumbered (sic) and at liberty to enter into the employ' (*Sydney Gazette*, 29 July, 1804; 21 October: 1804; 28 October: 1804; 4 November 1804).⁴¹ These requirements may have had something to do with their good standing after being freed from the penal system (*Sydney Gazette*, 29 July: 1804). As noted in the regular newspaper advertisements the men were required to meet good character requirements in order to seek a clearance from the administration of Port Jackson. This was necessary before they could be engaged in the seal fishery operations to the southward (*Sydney Gazette*, 29 July: 1804). It appears from the tone of these advertisements that the merchants wanted a better class of men who were likely to keep on the right side of the law, and work under orders, rather than be troublesome and slothful.

The colonial administration would have been aware of the risks of sending gangs of men who were of dubious character to the remote edge of the colony, supervised or not. With the men working outside of the scrutiny of colonial

⁴¹ It is assumed that the men were not assigned and that they were ex-convicts, as there would not have been a need to advertise in the newspaper if they were still convicts. The description in the advertisements was for men *free from encumbrance* and *of good character*, perhaps this meant free of debt, or not repeat offenders (*Sydney Gazette*, 29 July: 1804).

authority, they would be expected to work independently and not to abscond. There is no doubt the opportunity of absconding the grip of colonial authority, especially from the sealing grounds, was a real possibility if they were so inclined (Cumpston, 1973: 28). The merchants would not want men with bad reputations who may have been tempted to make their escape on passing foreign ships taking with them the valuable skins and equipment.

As highlighted above, men who had served their sentences and met the good character requirement were eagerly sought by the entrepreneurial merchants of Port Jackson. Understandably, it was in the merchant's economic interest to have reliable and capable men to work for them in the remote sealing outpost of Kent Bay. There was also a need for men who were responsible to direct the large gangs on the sealing grounds, supervise the operations at base-camp, and most importantly, to keep order amongst the men (*Sydney Gazette*, 29 July, 1804). It was in the interest of all concerned that the most reliable men of good character, as well as having strong physical attributes, be selected.

2. 1. 4 Lifestyle of the early seal hunters.

The first sealers worked the sealing grounds throughout the summer months from November to February. They toiled long and laborious hours in crude conditions sometimes rowing up to twenty-two nautical miles return a day to rendezvous with the seal colonies on the rocky reefs and landing beaches (Cumpston, 1973: 11). Every hour of daylight would have been taken up with the preoccupation of harvesting and processing the seals for their valuable by-products. When each

working day on the sealing grounds was finished the men were no doubt covered from head to toe in seal blood and the lingering smell from the putrid rookeries.

Killing these sea mammals was usually quick and effective and carried out with a sharp blow to the nose using an iron club (Cumpston, 1973: 59). The environment in which the men carried out this task comprised slippery rocky outcrops that were exposed to wild weather and covered with seal excretions, all of which added another dimension to the anguished cries of seal amongst their bloody quest (A big Country, 1975; Douglas, 1986). Such places, favoured by the seals to make landfall, often washed by waves and surrounded by strong flowing tides, were extremely dangerous for both the men and their small wooden vessels. The other threat associated with moving amongst a mass of large seals was being seriously injured, or even drowned.

The task of killing, moving and lifting the large animals into the dinghies required the sealers to have considerable strength and stamina. Bull seals grow to an enormous size of 2.25 metres long and weigh up to 360 kilograms (Brown, 1991: 11). The adult females, or clapmatches,⁴² grow up to 1.5 metres in length and weigh as much as 90 kilograms (Brown, 1991: 11). Once the tally was reached, collectively numbering two hundred carcasses, the task of transporting the crew and the large sea mammals again required sheer grit by the sealers, who then became oarsmen.⁴³ The distance from base-camp depended on the location of the sealing rocks, and the exhausted sealing gangs made their unenviable and often prolonged return journey to

⁴² Clapmatches were the young females that had just birthed their young.

⁴³ As mentioned, the seals were not processed at the killing rocks but were transported back to base camp to be skinned. However, it is feasible that to lighten the load the guts were disposed of before reaching base camp.

their Kent Bay base camp (Cumpston, 1973: 11). Consequently, working on the sealing rocks and in the dinghies were not jobs for those with a weak disposition. The daily routine required strong and robust sealers who could sustain the four-month season. According to Ryan (1991: 66), 'Between 1800 and 1806 over 100,000 seal skins were obtained, equating to an average seasonal harvest of sixteen thousand and seven hundred skins. Assuming there were about five separate gangs involved in the combined daily harvest of one hundred and forty, each gang targeted twenty-eight large sea mammals per day.

At base camp, fires were kept stoked, probably a job allocated to the young boys, under the heavy cast iron pots that were used to render down the seal carcasses and extract the oil, following removal of the skins. The large cast iron trying-pots, imported from England and America, were essential seal processing equipment utilised by each gang at Kent Bay, and subsequently these rusting hulks were used all over eastern Bass Strait islands (Adam-Smith, 1965: 176-77; Adams- Smith, 1978: 16-17; Brothers *et al*: 2001: 284). Preparation of the skins required them to be scraped and pegged out on wooden stakes, (probably utilising local ti-tree) or metal spikes for drying in the sun before being bundled up and stored in huts. The gangs built rough huts to safely store the skins and barrels of oil until the season's end (Cumpston, 1973: 56). They also constructed huts for their living and sleeping quarters and several would have been necessary to accommodate each gang (Cumpston, 1973: 22 & 55). The infrastructure remained at Kent Bay set up as a central base-camp for immediate use by the gangs who arrived at the beginning of each season.

2. 1. 5 Contact with the outside world out of Kent Bay.

From their operations at Kent Bay the sealer's main contact with the outside world was with the crews of merchant ships who arrived to resupply base camp with men and supplies. There were occasions when the gangs were left to their own devices with meagre supplies of salted meat, flour and biscuit (Cumpston, 1973: 56), with little hope of the mother ship's arrival before their staple foods ran out. In 1805, Colonel Patterson reported to the colonial governor that a crew of sealers had sailed across from Kent Bay to Port Dalrymple out of sheer desperation to beg for help. Their mission was to 'solicit a supply of provisions to relieve their difficulty and the whole of twenty other people [as well as] another crews [who] having been without provisions, and languishing with cold and hunger' (*Sydney Gazette*, 8 September, 1805). On this occasion there were at least two gangs who were on the brink of starvation for they had been left without provisions for many weeks. A small crew used a small dinghy to travel to the nearest colonial outpost for urgent supplies. The colonial government was made aware of such incidents of neglectful practice by sea captains and merchants (Stevens, 1965: 114).⁴⁴ These drastic measures taken by the sealers suggest that they had no other option than to row past their closest neighbours along the northeast coast to reach the Tamar River. Surely, if there were other options to barter for food closer to base-camp they would have done so.

It seems that during the first phase of sealing operations the crews were not able to live off the land. They either lacked the time to hunt for wild foods until stores arrived, or did not have the skills or knowledge of what to collect. Although

⁴⁴ Governor King was moved by the reports from Patterson and colonial newspapers to the point where he was forced to arbitrate against merchants and sea captains '... to ensure that sealers were not starved or abandoned ...'. (Stevens, 1965: 114)

O'May (1959:7) suggests that the gangs 'had to live on mutton-birds, fish and kangaroo' while they were at Kent Bay, it seems unusual that when they had reached a point of starvation they had to seek help from outside. There is no indication of livestock (for example, cows, sheep, goats, rabbits or fowls) being kept at the Kent Bay base camp and the men were not authorised, or equipped, to travel to the nearest colonial outpost when their provisions ran low. The desperate situation that the first phase sealers found themselves in at the Kent Bay base camp further suggests that they had not lived off the land and therefore relied completely on their rations. Significantly, these sealers would not have languished with cold and hunger for up to ten weeks without provisions if they had women with the capacity to hunt for a range of wild foods in order to prevent starvation and provide for their needs.

Another voyage made out of desperation was reported in 1805. A sealer was left on Swan Island to protect a ship's store and, after a period of eight weeks without the return of the ship, and fearing the ship had met with some disaster, he believed he had been abandoned (Cumpston, 1983: 31). His precarious situation saw him cast off alone to row across Banks Strait, a distance of some eleven nautical miles, to Kent Bay to seek a passage out of the straits (*Sydney Gazette*, 28 July: 1805.) The long and dangerous trip from Swan Island to Kent Bay is a persuasive indicator that no regular social contact had been forged at the beachhead between colonial seamen and the Coastal Plains clans. In this instance, the most sensible and direct option would have been to cross at the shortest distance from Swan Island to the safety of the northeast coast, rather than risk perilous Banks Strait and the strong tidal passage to Kent Bay. It may be that the desperate seaman preferred to take his chances to reach Kent Bay

rather than come face to face with the northeast clansmen. Circumstantial evidence strongly suggests there were no Trouwunnan women at the Kent Bay sealing base-camp or on the sealing grounds during the early period. This is indicated by the men's inability to survive when rations were overdue. There are no records of any females living at Kent Bay.

There was, however, a Hawaiian woman recorded as living in a sealers camp at the western end of Bass Strait by French scientific voyage members, Baudin and Peron, in 1802 (Plomley, 1983, 101). The French observed sealers hunting kangaroo for meat in the western straits, however, they also mention that only meagre supplies were provided by the Port Jackson employers to their sealing gangs (Cumpston, 1973: 56). Although this brief contact between the French and colonial sealers was confined to the western straits their observations are extremely important. With contact with the sealing operations being rarely recorded, the French expeditions of 1802 and 1803 provide us with perhaps the most reliable and significant outside observations of that time. During their voyage through Bass Strait, the French found the base camp at Kent Bay deserted and did not encounter any sealers in the immediate area (Plomley, 1983: 98). They were aware of the important location of Kent Bay as a major centre of sealing operations and were obviously hoping to make contact with the English sealers there, however, they offer no explanation why the sealers were not present. They did meet one sealing vessel near Swan Island, and another off the Bay of Fires, both heading south to harvest seals along the east coast. The English and French crews had social discourse, and on one ship the French counted fourteen crewmen and a cabin boy, however, there is no mention of seeing

women accompanying these sealing crews (Plomley, 1983: 112). Whilst there are very few ethnographic accounts of the early sealing activities, what we do have does not support the view that Trouwunnan women were intimately involved with the first phase of sealing activities

The type of work required by men on the sealing grounds and processing activities at base camp, requiring constant use of sharp skinning knives and operating with boiling oil, placed them at high risk of injury. The gangs were not only at risk from illness and lack of medical assistance, but there was an ever-present danger of being drowned (O'May, 1959: 11-2) or seriously injured (Cumpston, 1983: 69). During the first phase of sealing operations in Bass Strait there is no evidence that the men in Kent Bay made contact, or established relationships, with their nearest neighbours who lived opposite on the northeast coast. Therefore, in times of urgent need the nearest help for the colonial outpost of Kent Bay was Sydney Town, followed by Hobart Town from 1803 and Port Dalrymple from 1804.

2. 1. 6 A measure of toughness.

According to author Jean Edgecombe (1986: 11-2), the sealers were tough to survive a season of monotonous and laborious work in the isolated and often harsh saltwater environment of eastern Bass Strait. Their approach to killing seal is relayed through the Sydney Town press and may be likened to their experience under British convictism. A journalist wrote a sealer's account of killing the seals,

[O]ne of the combatants engaged in the warfare had the misfortune, as he himself declares, to be feverly (sic) bit by an old counsellor, against whom he had commenced an action of battery; a second with difficulty escaped the clutches of a junior barrister, attended by a group of lions, and all the wigs were knocked off without much

trouble and the poor clapmatches fell an early victim (*Sydney Gazette*: January, 1805).

It appears that the sealers saw themselves as judge and jury in a courtroom, or soldiers on the battlefield, and the seals were dispatched as their victims (Plomley, 1966: 342).⁴⁵ Whilst the readers of the *Sydney Gazette* may have speculated on the process as being cruel and inhumane, it was not always the sealers who won the fight, with severe injuries often inflicted on the hunters by the frightful bite from an old bull seal (Plomley, 1966: 342).⁴⁶ Seals were killed by the strength of the sealer welding an iron rod, and this physical combat led to them gaining the reputation as being 'notorious for their callousness' (Adam-Smith, 1965: 40-1). We can imagine the plight of sealers without appropriate medical attention, suffering from pain and infection, which could ultimately lead to an agonising death or a debilitating injury.

2. 1. 7 Foreigners, buccaneers and cutlass bearing braggarts.

During the first decade of commercial sealing Bass Strait was not the sole domain of the colonial sealers and merchant shipping. Within a few years of the discovery of the extensive seal colonies around the Bass Strait islands foreign vessels from distant shores sailed into Kent Bay to take their share of the seal harvest (Bethell, 1957: 30-3). As a result of the convergence, in the early 1800s, of the foreign and colonial vessels in the area, many legends emerged that were directly related to disputes between the colonial sealers and the others (O'May, 1959: 8-11). Reports from the Bass Strait sea frontier painted images of buccaneers and cutlass bearing braggarts

⁴⁵ The descriptions in the *Sydney Gazette* have direct association with the court of law and the military i.e.: junior barristers, combatants, counsellors, and the terms of lions, wigs and clapmatches are given to the seals.

⁴⁶ George Augustus Robinson saw the scared calf of one of the seal hunters that had been severely bitten by a large seal. Anderson told him that 'he knew a man who had the calf of his leg bit off...' (Plomley, 1966: 342).

pervading the sealing grounds, who along with the colonial sealers, competed for the acquisition of skins and oil that were in great demand on the global market. Colonial gangs regarded the seal colonies as being inside colonial waters and therefore should not be available to foreigners (O'May, 1959: 11). The Port Jackson sealers resented the presence of overseas crews who they believed were stealing their livelihood (O'May, 1959: 8-11). Their resentment at sharing what they believed to be their seals led to serious conflict.

Several large vessels, armed with cannons, from as far as Nantucket arrived in the Bass Strait to seek out a share in the seal fishery (O'May, 1959: 8). The masters of these big well armoured fur trading ships, with a combined crew of sixty men, pursued every opportunity to search for new sources of skins (O'May, 1959: 8). The presence of foreign sealers in the colonial sealing grounds, especially crews off American ships, incited regular verbal and physical retorts with the colonial sealers, and the many incidents proved to be an irritation to the colonial authorities in Sydney Town (O'May, 1959: 10-1). Colonial merchants based in Sydney Town objected to sharing their bounty with foreigners. They complained to Governor King about this and the violent treatment and intimidation their men had received from the American crews (O'May, 1959: 11). The other side of the argument was forthcoming when one of the American captains penned his version of events in a letter to the Governor (O'May, 1959: 10).⁴⁷ There were accusations made from both sides and several incidents erupted into violent clashes that resulted in serious physical injury and the loss of equipment (O'May, 1959: 10). Incidents were reported to the authorities in

⁴⁷ American Captain Delano complained of the behaviour of the colonial sealers and of the danger his crew was threatened with. He accused the locals of stealing equipment and preventing his crew from accessing the sealing grounds (O'May, 1959: 10)

Sydney Town that related to counter attacks by colonial sealers upon some American seamen involving a cutlass. This led to retaliative attacks, one of which left a colonial sealer with a broken arm and a near drowning (O'May, 1959: 9). These conflicts waned when the two American vessels, the captains frustrated by the lack of colonial government intervention, departed the straits for destinations outside of colonial waters.

With their sudden departure the American perpetrators escaped being apprehended by the authorities. They also took with them some colonial absconders who had been smuggled onboard (O'May, 1959: 11). Consequently, stories of buccaneers and cutlass bearing braggarts resonated from the straits throughout the colony and became imbued in legend. The stories that issued from the sealing grounds exaggerated and perpetuated the events that took place in 1804 between the foreigners and colonial gangs, and incriminated all men engaged in sealing operations as violent and lawless.

2. 1. 8 Aboriginal involvement in the early sealing operations.

Throughout the first decade of the 1800s sealers did not live permanently on the Bass Strait islands. Their homes were in Sydney Town and they were engaged under agreements to work the sealing grounds on a seasonal basis. There has been much written about social interaction between the first phase sealers and Coastal Plains clanspeople. As indicated above, there are no reports of Trouwunna men or women being present with the sealers in the Bass Strait sealing operations during the sealing seasons of 1798 to 1810.

The first indication of an Aboriginal presence in the sealing grounds is a reference to an Aboriginal youth from Sydney Town being engaged in sealing in a colonial newspaper.

We reflect with pleasure on the possibilities of our natives being gradually weaned of their indolent habits, and rendered useful in society. Several of their youth are at this time employed in the various sealing gangs in the straits, upon lay... (*Sydney Gazette*, 17 March 1805).

This newspaper article dated 1805 provides the first evidence of Aborigines in the early colonial sealing industry. The article clearly identifies the Aboriginal youth are from Port Jackson and are engaged under the same 'lay'⁴⁸ arrangements as their English counterparts. These young Aboriginal sealers were not from Trouwunna, nor were they female. There were no advertisements placed in the Sydney Town newspaper that would indicate women were needed to work as sealers.

The advantage of utilising the Trouwunna women to assist with harvesting seals was not recognised until it was witnessed in 1816. Captain James Kelly acknowledged the women's skills of imitating and killing seals on George's Rocks off the far northeast coast (Kee, 1987: Appendix 11). Kelly's first hand account of the Coastal Plains women killing seals was witnessed some eighteen years after the first phase voyage-sealers, and under eight years since the river-town seal hunters, arrived on the sealing grounds. The captain had also been a regular sailor to these sealing grounds since the early days (Alexander, 2005: 198) and had not seen the clanswomen exhibiting their skills at catching seals until 1816. By 1816 the seals were shot from the whaleboats, which would suggest that the women's skills were not

⁴⁸ That is, a share of the catch that is divided amongst the crew of the ship and the sealing gang.

necessary for killing seals in a commercial sense, and on this occasion they were probably showing off their traditional skills to the seamen. There is a reference to two Sydney Aborigines working as a crew on a ship in 1817 (Mollison and Everitt, 1976: 1817),⁴⁹ however it is not clear if the vessel was engaged in the sealing trade. It has also been noted that ‘the [Aboriginal] men made good sealers’ (Alexander, 2005: 325) in the second phase of the industry as several Coastal Plains clansmen had been to the islands and worked on the whaleboats working in the straits.

* * *

2. 2 Escapees, Bandits and Desperadoes

This section aims to examine the types of characters who used the Bass Strait seaway as a haven to conduct unlawful activities and escape the colonial penal system. It investigates maritime activities, other than sealing operations, which were of a sinister nature. These activities had far wider repercussions at the colonial sea frontier than sealing had. This section unravels the nature of these different groups in order to differentiate them from those groups of men who were marine and land hunters, some of whom became permanent residents on the islands.

2. 2. 1 A lawlessness colonial legacy.

The Bass Strait sealing grounds and the men involved were deemed by many in colonial society to be out of reach of the law, or as Murray-Smith (1973: 172) wrote, ‘beyond the pale’, with no regulation of the industry or control over social behaviour. However, this did not necessarily mean that all sealers were associated with, or carried out, criminal activities, malicious deeds or violent acts against innocent

⁴⁹ There are no page numbers in this publication. It is written in chronological order using dates as the points of reference.

parties. The perception that the islands were out of reach of the law is somewhat of a misnomer because government ships regularly patrolled the straits on the lookout for escapees from the penal system and deserters from ships (O'May, 1959: 15). The purpose of government patrols was not focussed on the sealing gangs. Rather, they were under orders from the colonial government to recapture absconding convicts⁵⁰ and secure stolen property (Mollison and Everitt, 1976: 1826). It could simply be argued that there was no permanent authority present in the straits to enforce the law rather than the implication that the law could not reach them *per se*.

Escaping convicts from the colonial outposts of Van Diemen's Land were stealing boats (Nicholls, 1977: 180, 97, 340 & 520) from the colonists to make their escape through the straits, or to hideaway in the many islands, until they could find passage on passing ships that were departing colonial waters (Plomley, 1966: 1007). These types of men who were attracting the attention of military pursuit also stole other valuable possessions from colonial outposts to aid their escape (Nicholls, 1977: 112; O'May, 1959: 15). The pursuing authority concentrated their efforts on intercepting and capturing absconding thieves and convicts, and the sealers often had to take measures into their own hands to secure their valuable items (Plomley, 1966: 1007).

Regardless of the fact that there was more than one cohort of men occupying the islands and transiting the straits, those men who were engaged in hunting seals were stereotyped as one group of miscreants and lawbreakers (Adam-Smith, 1965: 42). The cohort that fitted the description of 'sealers' were conducting legal marine

⁵⁰ Captain Whyte of *The Duke of York*, as late as 1826, was in pursuit of penal absconders and captured seventeen from the Bass Strait islands. His mission was to 'scour the straits of runaways' (Mollison and Everitt, 1976, 1826)

operations with appropriate clearance from the colonial authorities to take their vessels into Bass Strait (Murray-Smith, 1973: 169). The gangs of men had been selectively screened specifically to go to the sealing grounds and the authority kept records of the character of every man operating legally in the straits (Cumpston, 1973: 74-7). Those men who were conducting unlawful operations in Bass Strait were more desperate characters who had not been cleared by the authorities to leave the colonial outposts, and were not legitimately hunting or trading sealing products.

2. 2. 2 Bass Strait: a seaway passage for escape.

Not all men on board ships that dropped anchor, or beached their vessels, in sheltered island coves around eastern Bass Strait, were welcomed into the seal hunter's world. After the establishment of the Van Diemen's Land penal stations on the Derwent River from 1803 and Tamar River from 1804, there was a spread of convicts, placed in servitude, throughout the colonised districts. Their passage was primarily through the Bass Strait sea corridor (O'May, 1959: 15-6). Thus the movement away from the close scrutiny of penal stations provided opportunities for those men who desired to escape convictism.

Many absconders stole small vessels and stores to make their escape, and made off with their bounty to destinations where they believed they would find freedom (Nicholls, 1977: 197). In one instance a huge reward of one hundred guineas was posted for information on the whereabouts of a vessel stolen out of Port Dalrymple (Nicholls, 1977: 257-59). Some escapees wanted to make for Timor or New Zealand (Nicholls, 1977: 82-3) because they were considered more desirable destinations than the Bass Strait islands where they feared recapture (Stokes, 1946a:

472-73). The further they ventured from the colonial waters the better their chances of not being found.

As early as 1803 French seamen discovered a number of escapee convicts on board their ships as they were leaving Bass Strait waters, and this was the first recorded incident of the sealing grounds being used as an escape route for convicts (Plomley and Henley, 1990: 5). Again in 1805, sixteen men were secreted onboard American ships as they headed out of colonial waters on course for New Zealand (O'May, 1959: 11-2). Whilst the French returned their runaways, the Americans continued on their voyage with the escapees as welcomed replacements to their sealing crew who had drowned in Kent Bay (Cumpston, 1973: 24-7). One group of escapees stole a colonial vessel and sailed to Valdivia, South America, where some of the men married local women. A man-o-war was dispatched from the colony to capture them, but they avoided their military pursuers (Stokes, 1846a: 472-73). This indicates the incredible distance and expense that colonial authority would take to recapture escapees. The islands and seaway of eastern Bass Strait were therefore convenient steppingstones to freedom rather than the ultimate utopia for escapees from Port Jackson and Van Diemen's Land convict systems.

Kent Bay sealing gangs had occasional visits from escapees who were usually closely followed by colonial vessels with military on board. The military regularly scoured the straits in search of runaway convicts, stolen boats (*Hobart Town Gazette*, 25 March: 1826) and other valuable items (Nicholls, 1977: 112, 278-79). These were perilous times for escapees and the sealers alike and it was not usually the latter group who came off the better, especially in regards to their valuable stores and their

reputation (O'May, 1959b: 16). One incident was reported of sealers being intruded upon by desperate men on the run from the colony who deliberately destroyed a large number of prime skins that had been stored ready for market (Plomley, 1966: 1007). Reports of this incident emphasised that it was the 'legitimate sealers' whose income would suffer greatly because of this wilful damage and that they were under great danger of being murdered (O'May, 1959b; 16).

Relations were obviously hostile between seal hunters and escapees if the destruction of their stores is any measure to go by. The escapee's actions were deliberate and reprehensible, which clearly negated any sympathetic treatment, protection or assistance by the sealers to aid their escape. This incident of wilful destruction of sealer's property created suspicion in the sealers' minds of anyone arriving unannounced at their Kent Bay establishment. The sealers would be placing an added burden on their meagre supplies if men arrived without provisions. Moreover, the greatest risk they took was of losing their freedoms if they were caught sheltering and aiding escapees.

There are many accounts of men escaping from Van Diemen's Land from 1804 (Nicholls, 1977: 112, 180, 197, 340 & 502). This constant movement of runaways caused the authorities great concern as many gained their freedom by avoiding the military pursuit vessels. Rewards were posted in the *Sydney Gazette* (1 September, 1805; 8 September, 1805) by the colonial government for information on the whereabouts of colonial and foreign deserters from the sealing gangs and sailing vessels. The newspaper reported that ship captain's were to be penalised to the sum of 500 pounds if they attempted to take on board absconders and deserters. Rewards

(*Sydney Gazette*, 15 September: 1805) were also posted for information on the whereabouts of escapees from penal stations.

2. 2. 3 Desperadoes and banditti.

Although many escapees attempted to get out of the straits as soon as possible, there were other groups who formed bushranging gangs. Gangs of desperadoes appearing in the Bass Strait gained the reputation as being 'a banditti of bushrangers' (Murray-Smith, 1973: 169). These men, mostly escapees from the convict system, organised themselves into small renegade groups and became the bushrangers of the sea. Many incidents were recorded throughout colonial times of desperate men who fitted this description using the vastness of Bass Strait from where to conduct raids to plunder and attack the colonial outposts. One example of plunder was recorded by The Reverend Robert Knopwood in August 1806 when the brig *Venus*, along with ten thousand pounds worth of property stored on board, was stolen from Port Dalrymple by escaping prisoners (Nicholls, 1977: 112). The Reverend was personally affected with the loss of a large quantity of spirits that was part of the cargo, and along with the other extremely valuable items, the thieves would benefit greatly at the expense of the colony.

At a later date Knopwood recorded another ship, the *Argo*, being stolen by eight escaping prisoners from Hobart Town during July 1814. This incident was followed by another attack on the Port Dalrymple store, which when 'left unprotected [thieves] plundered [the store], taking away the boats. [The] principal leader in the outrages [was] Peter Geary, a deserter from His Majesty's 73 Regt., charged also with murder' (Nicholls, 1977: 257–59). This crime prompted a proclamation by

Lieutenant-Governor Sorell, dated 5 July 1814, that announced a reward of one hundred guineas for any information on the theft of the boat and stores. The Governor offered free pardons to five servants of the Crown who were employed at Port Dalrymple to assist in the capture of the 'banditty' (sic) who absconded with the boats (Nicholls, 1977: 257–59). Knopwood noted in his diaries that these men were pirates and thieves and he did not refer to them as sealers on any occasion.

The term 'banditti' was first used by Captain William Stewart who, in 1815, categorised such men as those who did not have clearance by the colonial authority based at Port Dalrymple and Hobart Town (Calder, 1972: 14). These men were not sealers. According to Stewart the bandits were escaped prisoners and thieves who committed 'robberies and depredations on the industrious Settlers and others' (Smith, 1978: 40). Calder's account links the sealers with the cohort of bandits and desperadoes whom he regards as equally depraved, and he also implies that the two were in league stating:

From the earliest times of the occupation of the country, a horde of reprobates lived on these islands [out of sight] of human observation ... quite beyond the range of the government ... mostly a mixed class of runaway convicts [of] bad character and disposition ... accompanied by likeminded [and they were] as licentious as the sealers (Calder, 1972: 14).

The banditti were operating in close proximity to the settled districts or using the islands to launch their raids on the colony. They avoided society because they were felons and escapees who 'skulked and lurked about to evade justice' (Nicholls, 1977: 278, 279 & 81). This behaviour does not match that of the second phase seal hunters, or the men who later settled in the island who sailed their boats into the Tamar River, to trade their goods in full view of the colonial authority.

Captain Stewart's report to Colonial Secretary Campbell did however make particular reference to his concern about the presence of malicious types using the Bass Strait islands as a base from which to carry out raids on the mainland of Van Diemen's Land. He wrote:

For several years it had been the practice for whaleboats, twenty to thirty feet long, to clear out of Hobart and Port Dalrymple apparently with only two or three men on board, but in fact with several convicts hidden. These escapees took dogs and arms to hunt kangaroos and seals on the islands, and were a Banditti of Bushrangers who escaped in this way after committing robberies and other outrages to acquire food and arms. Shortly after their departure vessels would be sent after them From their island bases they would venture as far as the heads of Port Dalrymple to pick up news, and they were always seeking to persuade men in sealing gangs to desert their employers These buccaneers raided the Tasmanian mainland for aboriginal (sic) women and they traded in them (HRA, III, ii: 575-76).

Stewart makes several claims in the above report to Campbell. He asserts that seamen were involved in smuggling convicts on board as they left the colonial towns, and although he does not say they are voyage sealers there is an implication that they are. He says that the escapees are sealing and hunting in the islands, yet does not identify which islands, and these men later become the bandits who were illegally operating in the straits. It seems that the seamen who are operating the whaleboats out of the river towns are authorised to do so and they do not match Stewart's description above. According to Murray-Smith:

Here is evidence then, and amongst the first we have, that the Bass Strait Islands are being used as a independent operational base by supposed desperadoes who saw these islands both as a haven of personal freedom, and as a source of income to make the freedom viable (1973: 170).

Stewart described the banditti as thieves, raiders of women and buccaneers,⁵¹ and such labels have been perpetuated in the literature to add to the colourful repertoire of sealer folklore. What is more, Stewart certainly did not refer to the buccaneers of 1815 as sealers. His statement above implies that even though there may have been close geographic association between the different types, they constitute different cohorts of men. Stewart discerns both cohorts as miscreants or men of bad reputation, and regardless that these assertions have not been proven, the majority of accounts of colonial times have portrayed all these groups as sealers.

One maritime historian referred to banditti as those men who kill sea elephants for their tongues and trade skins with shore-based accomplices for clothing, food and ammunition (Hainsworth, 1971: 37). Although Hainsworth did not elaborate on where these shore-based accomplices were situated, it is possible that they were associated with the sealers and others who were operating out of the Van Diemen's Land ports.⁵² It is highly unlikely that there would be any food, clothing or ammunition surplus among the island seal hunters' community as all items mentioned by Hainsworth would have to be retained for their survival in the islands. Further, sea elephants were principally located in the islands off the north west coast and to sail from the west coast to the eastern Bass Strait islands for surreptitious trade would expose these crews to an increased threat of recapture. There were sealers who were trading in salted sea elephant tongues, and copious amounts of oil that were stored by the enormous sea elephants, and they would not have wasted that source of income

⁵¹ The term 'buccaneers' emerged during the first phase of sealing (see 2. 1. 7)

⁵² Stokes records that a group of thieves and lawless men were occupying York Town on the Tamar River in the mid 1800s: 'the chief part of the inhabitants were a lawless set, who were said to live, chiefly by plunder' (1846b: 433).

just to sell the tongues (Cumpston, 1973: 59-60). The merchants would have been reckless to engage men who reputedly associated with banditti, and the seal hunters would have risked their freedom if caught working in association with the bandits.

The above discussion identifies a number of different groups of men who were using the straits for a range of purposes during both phases of colonial sealing operations. One group comprised sealers who were operating in the first phase out of Port Jackson and sealers of the second phase who were based in Van Diemen's Land ports. The other group of men, known as banditti or bushrangers of the sea, were escapees and thieves, who used the islands as a hideout from which to plunder the colony and conduct a range of illegal operations. These cohorts are different—one operates within the law, the other does not.

In 1818 a government launch stolen from Hobart Town was sighted near the Tamar Heads five days later. The offenders did not intend to hide out in the eastern Bass Strait islands. Rather, to avoid the military pursuit vessel, they secreted the boat in a river west of the Tamar and were captured, placed under military guard, and sent to Sydney Town for trial (Nicholls, 1977: 279-81). Among the party were three men, David Kelly, John Smith and John Briggs. The episode indicates that maritime activities around the coast and in the islands did not go unnoticed and some absconders were caught, however, many were not.

The above-mentioned John Briggs could not have been George Briggs's son because he was only a young child at the time. In the case of ex-convict David Kelly, he may well have had connections with bandits, for he was responsible for shooting and wounding Tebrikunna bungunna, Mannalargenna (Plomley and Henley, 1990:

49). John Smith was a seaman in the Merchant Service, who left to go sealing in the straits in 1818 (Plomley and Henley, 1990: 63), and it is unlikely that he is the same person involved in the above incident. Circumstances of men sharing the same surname or given names is highlighted as a frustration by Plomley and Henley (1990: 2) who warned that, 'Some names which appear in the earliest records of sealing appear again in later ones, but that is not to say that they refer to the same person'. It is therefore possible that some of the men associated with marine activities in Bass Strait were branded with reputations through false identification.

2.2.4 Seawolves and pirates.

Yet another label, 'seawolves', is used to describe pirates whose presence in the straits is often melded with the economic activities of seal hunters. The earliest expression of 'seawolves' is found in the French scientific journals of 1802 (Plomley, 1983: 112 & 221) to describe seals rather than the men who hunted them, perhaps relating directly to the predatory nature of these large mammals or the barking noises that they make. This term has been more recently linked to men who hunted the seals and maybe the association is to both being predatory hunters. As time went by the seal hunter's reputation grew with the literature. In his chapter 'Sea Wolves of the Islands', Coultman Smith stated that reputations of the men who occupied the islands were based on legends that were exaggerated through colonial newspaper reports.

Smith asserts that:

The islands of Bass Strait had European occupants before Tasmania itself was settled, and it was not long before a legend grew of a brutal, lawless band of pirates who lived by plunder there. It was a legend which was nurtured by wild rumour and over-lavish journalese. There are fewer facts to substantiate the picture (Smith, 1978: 39).

Smith's verdict that these reports were lacking truth and based on rumour and innuendo, has paradoxically been overshadowed by his own use of the term 'seawolves'. Intentional or not, he appears to defend the reputation of island occupants by implying they are unfounded, while adding to their list of characterisations. Earlier, author Lindsay Norman (in Stuart, 1997: 28) titled his publication 'Seawolves and Bandits' which portrayed the seal hunters as bad characters. This might have influenced Smith's attempt at exposing these characterisations as legend. The most recent publication on Van Diemen's Land colonial history by James Boyce (2008: 15), acknowledges that the range of images presented by Norman and echoed by others, 'is a view that still has wide currency'. We can only hope that these legends are not recapitulated as an accurate portrayal of the seal hunter's character.

* * *

2.3 Phase two: Seal Hunting—1810 to 1820

The aim of this section is to analyse early sea frontier contact relations, and identify Aborigines who were associated with sealing activities in eastern Bass Strait. It seeks to unravel the transitional stages of transient seal hunting operations from the river towns to the emergence of permanent occupation of the islands in eastern Bass Strait. It explores the motivations and influences that led to the transitional stages, and the space, where two cultures became intertwined.

2.3.1 River-town sealing operations.

The industry that was once an important colonial enterprise from 1798 was doomed because of the rapid depletion of seal populations (Plomley and Henley, 1990: 12).

By 1810 the vast seal colonies of Bass Strait had been hunted incessantly to the point where the hair seal had become extinct, and the fur seal reduced to small and timid herds scattered around rocky islets in Bass Strait (Smith, 1978: 40). With the disappearance of large congregations of seals the highly organised transitory sealing gangs from Port Jackson left to plunder more lucrative sealing grounds (Begg and Begg, 1979: 57). The entrepreneurial merchant traders relocated their ships and sealing gangs to work across the Great Australian Bight to King George Sound (Western Australia), as well as south towards Macquarie Island in the Southern Ocean, and across the Tasman Sea into New Zealand waters. More distant destinations beckoned the profit seekers as they searched for, and plundered, new seal colonies.

With only small and scattered colonies remaining, seals became wary of approaching boats and the presence of humans, making them difficult to catch. The second phase of colonial seal hunting fundamentally changed in nature and circumstance. Crews became small as they continued to hunt seals, and were usually made up of three to five men, operating principally out of the colonial river towns of Port Dalrymple, Launceston and Hobart (Smith, 1978: 40; Nicholls, 1977: 197, 200 & 277; Murray-Smith, 1973: 169). These operations, using small wooden whaleboats from six to ten metres in length, were financed and controlled by a number of Van Diemen's Land merchants (Alexander, 2005: 234 & 303). A report to the Colonial Secretary Campbell in 1815 from Stewart made reference to individuals whom he called 'industrious and fair traders' being supported by the seal fisheries, 'that has been a means of supporting and employing numbers of individuals as well as vessels

in an industrious manner' (Stewart, 1815: 575–76). In response to the changing seal fishery operations, the river-town sealers engaged by the local merchants, made trips to and from their colonial homeports throughout the sealing season.

It is unclear whether the second phase river-town sealers utilised the Kent Bay facilities to dry skins and process oil, or whether they returned to port with the wet skins after disposing of the carcasses at sea. It is more likely that the smaller river-town gangs, not being able to carry out the labour intensive processing work that Kent Bay required, did not stay away from their homeports, instead making regular short trips to the sealing grounds as weather permitted. Therefore, the drying and tanning of skins would have been carried out at the river town ports.⁵³ Plomley and Henley (1990: 33) do not delve into the river-town sealers in their study, 'The Sealers of Bass Strait', although several of the five men who become permanent residents on the islands probably started out as river-town sealers. What emerged within the second phase of seal fishery are two distinct types of seal hunting operations in Bass Strait. One cohort, referred to above, are those sealing out of river towns of Launceston and Hobart. The other cohort incorporated a small number of men who desired to live an independent life and continued to hunt seals from their island homes.

2. 3. 2 They came for a quiet life.

According to Plomley and Henley a few 'adventurous [men] had come to the region largely upon sealing vessels and had remained there by choice'. They were men who 'just wanted a quiet life' (Plomley and Henley, 1990: 1 & 33). Choice, according to

⁵³ Wattle bark was an export product used for tanning skins and could have been used in the river towns to process the seal and kangaroo hides for market (Heather Felton in Alexander, 2005: 208).

Plomley and Henley, is at the heart of the decision by a few to become permanent residents on the small islands. As second phase seal hunters they abandoned the base-camp arrangements at Kent Bay and chose to live in the remoteness of Bass Strait rather than work out of the river towns of Launceston and Hobart. Although few in number, they preferred to establish their homes on selected smaller islands rather than utilise the large-gang facilities of the previous decade. Furthermore, the preferred secretive lifestyle led by these men gave them the reputation that they were living 'on the edge of the law' (Alexander, 2005: 371). It seems that their status of occupation, as well as the characterisations of them as thieves, pirates and bandits, would continue to haunt them. They were to become known as lawless 'miscreants' (Plomley, 1966: 324-25). Their perceived illegal status may have been a result of them choosing to make permanent homes on the islands and this put them at odds with the colonial law. For whilst they had been cleared to leave the river-towns and work the boats in the islands, they were not sanctioned by the same colonial authorities to remain as permanent residents on the islands.

2.3.3 The first families of the small-islands.

The first recorded mariner on the eastern Bass Strait islands was George Briggs who made his home on Clarke Island around 1812 (Plomley and Henley, 1990: 38). He seems to have been a Port Jackson voyage sealer who remained in Van Diemen's Land after 1810, and George Robinson (Robertson), who had previously lived on King Island in the western straits, may have been another (Plomley and Henley, 1990: 60-1). Briggs's arrival in the straits coincided with him forging the first relationships with the Coastal Plains people in the northeast. Starting on a very small scale, this early bonding between Briggs and the clanspeople shaped future relations

between the two cultures at the sea frontier. Consequently, this shift in timeframe challenges the generally held belief that there was social interaction, friendly or otherwise, between colonial seal hunters and the clansmen from 1798.

Plomley and Henley suggest that Briggs had arrived in the colony of New South Wales about 1805 on board the *Harrington*, as a young lad of about ten from Dunstable, in Bedfordshire, England. He is reported on sealing vessels in 1805, and again in 1808, after which he is not mentioned in the records again until 1815 when, as an accomplished boatman, he joined Captain James Kelly to circumnavigate Van Diemen's Land (Plomley and Henley, 1990: 18). His skills as a mariner were obviously recognised by Kelly who chose him as a crewman for the long voyage. Described as being five foot nine inches tall, with hazel eyes, freckles, light red hair and a ruddy complexion (Plomley and Henley, 1990: 38), Briggs resided on a semi-permanent basis, moving between the eastern Bass Strait islands and Launceston for almost twenty years.⁵⁴ Briggs worked for a firm of boat builders, chandlers and contractors in Launceston (Mollison and Everitt, 1976: 1816), where he was employed on a part-time arrangement, returning to the islands to be with his young family for the rest of the year.

When Kelly made contact with him in 1815, Briggs was living with his wife and several children on Clarke Island (Plomley and Henley, 1990: 18). It may be that Briggs's decision to make his home in the Bass Strait islands was more to do with his wife being a clanswoman than for economic reasons. His choice to live at the margins of colonial society closer to Woretermoteryenna's clanspeople, and away

⁵⁴ See Plomley's notes 53/3/2, Queen Victoria Museum and Art Gallery Library, Launceston

from the prying eyes of colonial society, seems to be a logical one. Their eldest child, Dalrymple Mountgarrett Briggs, was baptised in Launceston by Reverend Robert Knopwood on 18 March 1814.⁵⁵ This Christian baptism signalled one of many adaptations that the children of mixed heritage were to address under the influence of their Straitsmen fathers. Unlike their children the mothers continued to practice the spirituality of their countrymen (Stokes, 1846b: 451). It is not revealed why, but Briggs moved away from the islands to live permanently in Launceston at the end of 1831. As a skilled boatman, Briggs was engaged by captain Kelly, along with three other men, as an oarsman on the whaleboat *Elizabeth* to undertake charting of the Van Diemen's Land coastline in 1815/16 (Plomley and Henley, 1990: 38). It is highly likely that Briggs shared his earlier life at sea with James Kelly and had mutual respect for his seaman skills. Close links between the two seamen is apparent with Kelly's wife being related to the family business in Launceston where Briggs often worked.

Following Briggs's example of choosing a life in isolation from colonial society, the next man to arrive in the islands was Archibald (Jemmy) Campbell, a Scotsman from Glasgow, who was transported as a convict to Van Diemen's Land in 1803 (Plomley and Henley, 1990: 40). He is mentioned in Reverend Knopwood's diaries as being present in Hobart Town between 1805 and 1807 where he worked for some time as a ferryman on the Derwent River. Campbell deserted his post by absconding into the bush in 1810, and shortly afterwards made contact with Oyster Bay clanspeople near East Arm, and married one of their clanswomen almost

⁵⁵ See Plomley's notes 53/3/2, Queen Victoria Museum and Art Gallery Library, Launceston

immediately (Plomley and Henley, 1990: 40). Campbell was highly regarded by the Oyster Bay people who lived on the eastern shore of the Derwent River, with some of his wife's clan accompanying him to Hobart Town in 1814 (*Hobart Town Gazette*, 20 August 1814). He and his wife were living at South Arm on the east side of the entrance to the Derwent River,⁵⁶ and their eight-year old daughter, Marie or Maria, was baptised in 1818. She was born in 1810, the same year Campbell absconded. It is believed that Campbell's Trouwunnan wife died about 1820 (Plomley and Henley, 1990: 40). Campbell was an escapee when he moved his family to the islands sometime after 1814. He prospected for semi-precious crystals at a place that was to become known as 'Jemmy Campbell's' mine located opposite Woody Island, probably near Rooks River on Cape Barren Island. Campbell was granted a free pardon from Governor Davey after the governor received a gift of a large quantity of crystal gemstones from the miner (Plomley, 1966: 273). This is the earliest record of mining activities in the islands and Campbell's free pardon is indicative of the value of such a precious gift.

Described as short, about five feet four inches, with brown hair and hazel eyes, Campbell had suffered serious injuries, with distinguishing scars over each eyebrow, and a gunshot wound to his right ankle as a testimony to living a hard life. Plomley and Henley (1990: 40) refer to Campbell as a 'boatman', rather than a miner or sealer, and they fail to explain why he moved to the islands. As an able seaman and mariner, he was probably involved in seasonal seal hunting expeditions around the islands, as well as prospecting for gemstones between the hunting seasons.

⁵⁶ This information was received as correspondence from the Archives Office by NJB Plomley, September 199053/3/2, Queen Victoria Museum and Art Gallery Library, Launceston.

Known as 'Jemmy', Campbell died sometime before 1831 (Plomley & Henley, 1990: 40), after which time his daughter, Maria, was living east of Hobart, near Richmond (*Launceston Advertiser*, 1 June, 1831).

A Scotsman by birth, John Smith worked on the western Bass Strait sealing grounds around King Island from 1818 and claimed to be the first to establish a permanent residence on Gun Carriage Island. This was around 1820 (Plomley and Henley, 1990: 63). He was born in Scotland, and worked as an apprentice in the 'Merchant Service' before he came to the colony in 1818 (Plomley and Henley, 1990: 63). He joined the small number of mariners in the straits after his wife, Pleenperrenner or Mother Brown, had several children by him. Smith met his wife at Hunters Island about 1818 and she became his wife soon after she had survived a tragic boating accident in which two of her children and several seamen had drowned (*Hobart Town Gazette* 6 June, 1818; Plomley, 1966: 1019).⁵⁷ Smith and Pleenperrenner, who was a Coastal Plains clanswoman from Tebrikunna, had six children, and the couple remained together until she died in 1845 (Mollison and Everitt, 1976: 1845). In 1831 Smith was described as being about forty-five years old with light brown hair and whiskers. He was still living on Gun Carriage Island in 1847 aged about sixty-one (Plomley & Henley, 1990:63). Like Briggs and Campbell, Smith and his Trouwunnan wife and children probably found life on the islands more tolerable than living in colonial society.

John Harrington was certified a free man on 25 May 1820, after which time he sailed from Sydney Town on the *Little Mary* for Bass Strait (Plomley and Henley,

⁵⁷ James Parish, Robinson's coxswain in 1830, was involved in this boating accident and he was saved by Pleenperrenner (Plomley, 1966).

1990: 47). He established himself in the islands and had obtained a small wooden boat to work the local sealing grounds but his time as a seal hunter was to be short-lived. Harrington drowned off Gun Carriage Island in December 1824 (Plomley and Henley, 1990: 47). Soon after, another venture ended tragically when the same vessel became wrecked on Clarke Island reef in 1825 with all on board presumed drowned (Plomley, 1966: 257). Ironically, it was Harrington's boat that was taken by seven Trouwunnans, five women and two men, purportedly as a means of escape from the islands. It would be easy to argue that the women were escaping the islands because of abuse by their consorts but their desire to leave may have been due to numerous reasons. For example, the seven people may have been legitimately using the vessel as a means to return to their northeast clancountry, at the end of the seasonal muttonbird feather and sealing harvest, when the tragedy happened.

John Mira,⁵⁸ a Tahitian by birth, had black woolly hair, and was five feet ten inches tall. Robinson judged him to be a man of honourable character when he met Mira at Robbins Island in 1830, however, it is not known what happened to him after the mid 1840s. Mira may have joined Smith on Gun Carriage Island (Plomley, 1990: 55), and is mentioned several times in Robinson's journals as living in eastern Bass Strait in 1830.

The five men identified above were probably the first men to permanently settle in eastern Bass Strait sometime after 1810 and several had been seal hunters. They were primarily mariners who continued to hunt seal for their skins, albeit for a short season, but chose to leave the river-town sealing operations for a life on the

⁵⁸ There are numerous spelling of his surname including Myra and Mirey.

Furneaux Group of islands in eastern Bass Strait. All five men had Trouwunnan wives and children, and it is likely that the reason for them moving to the islands was not only to satisfy their own needs but also their decision would greatly benefit their families. John Briggs, John Harrington, John Smith, and John Mira, were still living on the islands to meet the next wave of men, who arrived after 1820, and who became permanent residents on the Furneaux Group of islands in eastern Bass Strait (see Appendix 1: Tables 1, 2 and 3; and Appendix 2: Map 5).

* * *

In Conclusion to Chapter Two

Seal fishery was the first export industry in New South Wales, and there were two distinct phases of colonial sealing operations. The first was voyage-sealing based out of Port Jackson, from 1798 to 1810, with colonial entrepreneurial merchants financing and operating the trade in sealskins and oil. The colonial government assisted the small number of merchants to engage men and boys who were of good character to work the sealing grounds in Bass Strait. The first sealing gangs were large and well organised, using small dinghies to reach the sealing colonies around the islands, returning to process the skins and oil at the Kent Bay base-camp. These voyage sealers, collectively numbering up to 200, were away from their home base for up to six months.

Foreign vessels and their crews were attracted to the sealing grounds from the early 1800s, which resulted in fierce competition for the seals with the colonial sealers who considered the resource to be theirs alone. There was much conflict and

legends about buccaneers and cutlass bearing braggarts grew from altercations between the two different groups. By 1810 the islands had been stripped of seals and the Port Jackson voyage-sealers left for more lucrative fields and played no further part in the lives of the Coastal Plain clanspeople.

From 1810 the second phase of sealing began with a new breed of men engaged by local merchant traders to work whaleboats out of the Tamar and Derwent river towns. These men are identified here as the river-town seal hunters. They comprised small crews who made short return trips to the Bass Strait islands throughout the sealing season. The river-town sealers were cleared by the law to take their vessels into the straits, however, they had to go cap-in-hand to the colonial authorities to get suitable crew. Some seal hunters often compromised their lawful operations by taking on board escaped felons to assist with the seasonal hunt and were at risk of being caught for doing so.

Between 1810 and 1820 about five men took up permanent or semi-permanent residence on about four small islands in the Furneaux Group. It was because of the constraints due to being indentured, and the risk involved of being caught with undesirable crews, that these few river-town seal hunters chose an independent lifestyle in eastern Bass Strait. Several of these men, who already had Trouwunnan wives and children before they moved to the islands, desired to live a quiet life away from the prying and censorious eyes of colonial society. A few others who did not have wives made social contact with the clans along the northeast coast and, following Coastal Plain laws, became incorporated into clan culture through a reciprocal exchange system. Initially, a small number of men traded dogs, flour and

sugar at the beachhead in exchange for clanswomen, and under their law these women became island wives. The men continued to kill seals, shooting them from the boats, and they traded the sealskins for supplies from the colonial river-towns. At least one of the men had commenced mining operations for semi-precious stones and possibly other minerals from the rich deposits found on the larger islands.

Throughout both phases of the seal fishery there were men, other than voyage-sealers and river-town seal hunters, of a more sinister reputation who were using the straits for a range of unlawful activities. These men included escapees and deserters who were seeking a passage of escape from colonial waters to avoid recapture. Another group were desperadoes who fitted the description of bushrangers of the sea, namely banditti, seawolves, pirates and thieves, who used the islands in the straits to plunder the colony of valuable goods and conduct other unlawful acts. These miscreants probably conducted violent raids on the clans along the northern coastline to abduct women. It is difficult to trace those clanswomen who may have been taken by these men, as no record exists of them being present when men were recaptured by a government ship searching the strait for escapees.

Chapter Three: The Threshold Where Two Cultures Blend

This chapter explores four primary interconnected issues that relate to the more intense period of contact relations, as they unfolded at the colonial sea frontier, between 1820 and 1830. It investigates the impacts of colonisation on the Coastal Plains people and their cultural practices, traces the development of social interaction between two different cultural groups, and examines the series of events that led to the disintegration of friendly relations at the sea frontier. The chapter discusses the nature of relations between the Coastal Plains clanswomen and European seal hunters who chose to make their homes in the islands north of Banks Strait. The aim is to understand more fully the circumstances that led to the economic and social development of small-island communities in eastern Bass Strait.

3.1 Initial Impressions at the eastern Bass Strait Sea Frontier

This section surveys points of first contact between Europeans and the clans along the northeast coast of Trouwunna. It considers the impressions these parties had upon the other and how the initial perceptions formed impacted on future relationships at the colonial sea frontier of eastern Bass Strait. Further, it highlights the methods used by the clans to monitor activities along their land and sea borders as they remained on alert to intrusion from the outside.

3.1.1 Close encounters with the outside world

The first recorded social contact between the Coastal Plains clanspeople and Europeans occurred in 1798. Two mariners, George Bass and Matthew Flinders, who were engaged by the colonial government to determine the extent of the

waterway that became known as Bass Strait, attempted to communicate with a Coastal Plains clansman in the northeast, near Waterhouse Point (Roth, 1899: 49). The clansman, accompanied by a female, was preoccupied with firing the bush, and not sighting the two Englishmen approaching, may have been taken by surprise. Despite the communication difficulties, he stayed put, but his female companion concealed herself (Roth, 1899: 41) and did not reappear. The female's reaction indicates that she was following traditional avoidance protocols. It is also possible the clansman recognised that the two men posed no threat and he stood his ground. He showed no fear and was civil towards the intruders. The three men, two from a different hemisphere, overcome the language barrier by using a form of sign language clearly understood by both parties.

The people were observed to 'feign inattention' (Roth, 1899: 41) as a normal Trouwunna response to strangers. It was noted that, 'At first, usual custom towards strangers, seemed scarcely to notice them' (Walker, 1897: 147), and 'It does not accord with their proper manners to appear to notice strangers [taking] no notice of us until requested to do so' (Roth, 1899: 43). Avoidance was clearly demonstrated, but not understood by the visitors a few days prior to the encounter, when Bass noted the reluctance of a group of clanspeople to meet with them as they approached the shore. He wrote in his journal that: 'This country is inhabited by men [and] their extreme shyness prevented any communication They made fire abreast of where the sloop was at anchor; but as soon as the boat approached the shore they ran off into the woods' (Kee, 1987: 15; Roth, 1899: 41). The clansmen had other more important business to do hunting and firing the land as they went (Plomley, 1966:

421),⁵⁹ and although it was normal practice for the clansman to take the first advance to accommodate visitors, they were not prepared to acquiesce. They had not invited the boatmen ashore using signal smokes as the Englishmen had assumed, they were managing their landscape using fire. Rather than fleeing in fear as the visitors perceived, the clansmen deliberately avoided meeting the boat by concealing themselves.

There is no doubt that the clansmen were aware of the vessel sailing along their coastline and they would have kept surveillance of its course. They were not overly concerned about being detected from the sea as the men continued firing the lands whilst in close proximity to the visitors. Furthermore, intimate knowledge of their territory gave them the advantage of concealing themselves from approaching vessels, showing no interest in challenging the mariners as they stepped ashore. The Coastal Plains clansmen's behaviour demonstrated their preference to initially ignore the presence of strangers, as there is no indication of aggression by them, even though they knew the exact location of the vessel, and that there were only two men attempting to make social contact with them. The encounter with the English mariners provides a measure of the clan's interest in the movement of colonial shipping along their seacoast from that time.

From 1798 the clanspeople witnessed the arrival and departure of many sailing ships from distant horizons, as well as seeing those close to their shores as the vessels transited the narrow passage of Banks Strait. Under full sail, with lofty canvas and massive hulls, the ships presented a spectacular sight to the clansmen who watched

⁵⁹ The practice of men firing the land as they hunted in the northeast was observed on several occasions by Robinson in 1830 and 1831 (Plomley, 1966: 421)

from their high ground. Just as the clansmen watched the arrival of people and ships in the Derwent River estuary in 1803 (Plomley, 1966: 375), the Coastal Plains sentinels would have kept close surveillance of the maritime activities, alerting neighbouring clans of their increasing and prolonged presence in the straits. As news of these maritime activities extended beyond the Coastal Plains borders throughout the numerous trade networks, it would have announced that these activities were associated with the islands of the dead.

As maritime activity increased, it must have occurred to the northeast people that the vessels were not just passing by, as they had done in the past. Ships became regular visitors to Banks Strait and along the east coast over the next five years from 1798, with their numbers increasing dramatically throughout this period. From 1804 vessels landed strangers on the shores of the Tamar River, to the west of the Coastal Plains nation, who took possession of the Stoney Creek nation's lands to build towns, plant crops and graze their animals (Bethell, 1957: 6-10). Over the next seven to ten years, because of the natural barriers of mountain range and dense vegetation, the Coastal Plains people were able to keep their distance from the colonisers who remained close to the founding settled districts. In the southern part of the island, clan leaders posted sentinels on the top of mountains and watched as the colonisers spread out from the river's edge and enveloped their lands (Plomley, 1966: 164 & 171).

At the entrance of the Tamar River, in late 1804, the clans watched the construction of huts on their land, and the Leterrmairrener⁶⁰ clansmen attempted to pull down the structures without success (*Sydney Gazette* 16 December, 1804; *Sydney*

⁶⁰This clan was part of the Stoney Creek nation, or North Midlands tribe (Ryan, 1996: 15)

Gazette, 23 December, 1804). The colonisation of the Stoney Creek lands expanded without reciprocal agreements from the clan leaders. Between 1808 and 1813 the population at Port Dalrymple had grown from 244 to 524 people, including officers, military and their families, and prisoners (Bethell, 1957: 20) and live stock in 1813 totalled 822 cattle, 5,326 sheep, twenty five horses, thirty goats and 413 pigs (Bethell, 1957: 22). Following normal cultural practice, the Coastal Plains people would have continued to watch for signs of intrusion into their lands. They were to soon meet the white men who beached their boats as well as those who occupied the lands to their west and far southeast, and the clanspeople soon discovered that they were not in spirit form.

3. 1. 2 French navigators - 1802/03.

Following Bass and Flinders, the next visitors to record their voyage along the east and northeast coast of Trouwunna were the crews of two French ships on a voyage of scientific discovery to the southern hemisphere. The French mariners did not meet with the Coastal Plains people, however, like most of the early mariners they sighted vast areas of smoke from bush fires across most of the coastal country. They estimated from the extent of these fires that there must have been a large number of people in this part of the island (Plomley, 1983:168 & 144). During the voyage along the Bay of Fires the crews fired off flares and cannon to signal a missing long boat that was overdue from undertaking close coastal surveying. Regardless of these displays during the night, that must have been heard and seen by the vigilant northeast clanspeople, there was no attempt made to make social contact with the French.

Over several weeks the French manoeuvred their ships near the coast between St Helens Point and Waterhouse Island, and they continued burning along coastal margins did not go unnoticed (Plomley, 1983: 139). When the French reached Waterhouse Island they concluded that the tameness of the seals 'as large as an ox' was an indication that the seal colonies along the northeast coast had not yet been disturbed by the English sealing gangs who had been operating in Kent Bay for four to five years (Plomley, 1983: 139). If their continued avoidance of the French was anything to go by the Coastal Plains people probably considered the Port Jackson sealers with the same regard. Given that the French conclusion was correct, that the Port Jackson sealers had not been hunting seal along the northeast coastline, they were also not likely to have yet ventured close enough to make social contact with the Coastal Plains people. The clans were always vigilant, keeping watch over their territorial lands and seacoast from high elevations, alert to any intrusion into their country. According to James Calder 'it was difficult to approach them thus; the greatest circumspection being necessary, for such was their vigilance, that it was rare to catch them off their guard; and this difficulty must have been increased when they became possessed of dogs;' (Calder, 1972: 37; *Launceston Advertiser*, 29 November, 1830). It therefore seems likely that until 1803 at least, the northeast people remained detached, the Europeans watched from the sea and the clans remained in concealment.

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3.2 Relations Between Two Cultures

This section investigates the impacts on the northeast coastal people, those whose roots were in this country, as they faced a barrage of influences from the outside. It aims to find the common ground on which the people, from two separate hemispheres,

established relations. The section explores the range of cultural influences that brought the two peoples together and the nature of relations that ensued, and seeks to understand how, when and why, the two groups bonded and formed mutual and obligatory agreements.

3. 2. 1 A nation's population strength and demise

The population of the Coastal Plains clans during the early years of colonial occupation was at full strength, totalling between 350 to 700 people (Ryan, 1996: 14). There is no way of estimating exact clan numbers, however, a strong indication is given in 1816. In this year Captain James Kelly and his crew onboard the *Elizabeth* who were on route to conduct a resource survey around the Trouwunnan coast, met with two large separate confederated clans collectively totalling 500 people, in the far northeast territories (Ryan, 1996: 69). The first group of about two hundred was located in Ringarooma Bay (Ryan, 1996: 69) and the second had gathered at Tangumronener.⁶¹ Kelly estimated that the people at Tangumronener comprised many men, women and children numbering up to three hundred (Kee, 1987: 18–9). This larger gathering of clanspeople probably represented a confederation of about three clans who came together for various reasons,⁶² including during times of conflict. The strength of their population in 1816 also tells us that the Coastal Plains clans in this region had not been subjected to significant impacts of colonisation on either side of the land or sea frontier, as at best if they had been, their population remained unaffected.

⁶¹ The contemporary name is Eddystone Point (Plomley, 1966: 959)

⁶² Mannalargenna told Kelly that he was in conflict with Tolobunganah and the two groups were preparing to fight, which is one explanation why there were several clans gathered at both places (Plomley and Henley, 1990: 18; O'May, 1959b, 18). The other reason may have been that they had gathered for ceremonial activities.

The seven to ten clans were reputed to have warriors of formidable force who could defend their lands and people from unwelcome intrusion, and Kelly's encounter with clan representatives in 1816, indicates considerable strength in numbers at two locations. In 1830 when Robinson started his trek into the northeast, he was convinced that he was to face a group of 700 'very fierce' clansmen (Plomley, 1966: 252-53), and if this were to be the case he perceived himself to be in 'great danger'.⁶³ Captain James Kelly stated in 1830 that it was his opinion the Trouwunnan population 'to be still great in the unsettled parts of the colony' (Walker, 1897: 176), which would have included the northeast lands. Given that Kelly's estimation was correct, and because the Coastal Plains clans were somewhat remote from the growing incursion of colonial settlement,⁶⁴ then it was likely that the northeast population would have still been substantial.

James Parish, Robinson's coxswain was a skilled seaman who had worked on Bass Strait river-town sealing vessels until the late 1820s, and also as a pilot on the Tamar River before joining Robinson's party in 1830 (Plomley and Henley, 1990: 58). When discussing recent northeast population estimations that had been calculated from the number of fires seen in the area from passing ships, Parish told Robinson (in late October 1830) that he had seen 300 clanspeople in the northeast. However, Robinson chose not to believe him (Plomley, 1966: 253). Unlike Robinson, Parish had first hand knowledge of the strength of the Coastal Plains clans

⁶³ A sea captain who had recently sailed the northeast coast said he saw 'hundreds of smokes but he never saw the people. Parish gave an actual number of 300 yet the clanswomen who had travelled with him saw only smokes (Plomley, 1966: 253).

⁶⁴ Although the area west of Pipers River had been settled earlier Bowood, which is located near Bridport, was the first property east of the Pipers River developed in 1838. Initially Bowood was a small holding on the northeast clanlands (*Examiner*, 6 October: 2007).

for he sailed this coastline on a regular basis as a seal hunter and more recently to collect clanswomen from the islands for the 'Line' operation. Robinson was attempting to ascertain how many clanspeople remained in the northeast lands and he was led to believe that the 'sealers' were responsible for killing many. Indeed, Parish had told Robinson that twenty clanspeople had been killed along this coastline. Because of his low opinion of the Straitsmen it is unlikely that Parish would overestimate the clan's population if he thought it would reflect badly on them. Parish called them 'little better than pirates' (Plomley, 1966: 256). Even though he had once been involved in sealing himself, he obviously wanted to portray them in the worst light to Robinson. It is therefore considered that Parish's estimation may have been reasonably accurate.

Presuming that Parish was correct in his population estimations, it is no wonder Robinson was surprised to discover that in November 1830 the Coastal Plains population was not even a tenth of Parish's estimation. Robinson was told the names of only about seventy souls who remained of the north, northeast, and east coast clans (Plomley, 1966: 266). The gravity of this realisation was significant given that this area incorporated over one third of the total landmass of Trouwunna—from the Tamar Heads, to the Derwent River, including Ben Lomond area and the midlands region as far as the foothills of the Great Western Tiers. According to Calder (1972: 24) the aforementioned area was once the domain of four great nations, namely the Stony Creek, Coastal Plains, Penny Royal Creek and Oyster Bay peoples, and they collectively represented all that remained of at least twenty three clans (Ryan, 1996:15-16). When in 1830 and 1831 Robinson met with three small groups who had

confederated together in the northeast region, the Coastal Plains people amongst them were but a small remnant (Plomley, 1966: 478-80). It is apparent that the Coastal Plains clans had experienced a rapid population decline in the late 1820s.⁶⁵

3. 2. 2 Impacts at the colonial frontiers.

Robinson certainly heard from leaders such as Mannalargenna who voiced their concerns about the impacts of colonisation in general, and the military in particular (Plomley, 1966: 438). In the spring of 1830 a group of Coastal Plains clansmen raided the Big River nation, and on their return, as they crossed the main Launceston to Hobart road near Campbell Town, they encountered soldiers who killed three of their party. The clansmen retaliated that same night, killing two soldiers as they slept (Plomley, 1966: 263). If every skirmish with the military and other armed parties resulted in even a handful of clansmen being killed, it would not take many such encounters to significantly impact on their numbers.

Robinson noted that wherever he went on Trouwunna the clansmen complained 'in bitter terms of the injuries to which they and their progenitors had been exposed through the medium of the whites [and that] the natives generally have a unconquerable aversion to soldiers' (Plomley, 1966: 438-39). There is little doubt that between 1828 and 1830 the threat of being killed by soldiers was real, and the possibility of confronting armed parties of men terrified the clanspeople (Plomley, 1966: 263-64, 438-39). Martial law⁶⁶ had been declared in November 1828 (Bonwick,

⁶⁵I am aware that this suggests a dramatic decline in the population over a short time span, the cause of which is outside the reach of this particular thesis.

⁶⁶ Martial law was declared in 1828 and from that time Calder states that the Trouwunnans became 'deadly enemies' of the colonisers (Calder, 1972: 45).

1869:81) and the military operation, 'The Line'⁶⁷ (Plomley, 1966: 277), was in full force in 1830 with several young Coastal Plains clansmen being shot by armed parties near Mt Ben Lomond between October and November (Plomley, 1966: 284). This period of colonial history put the lives of the clans in great danger as they were now considered an enemy under the law.

Parish told Robinson that when in Launceston he had overheard Captain Donaldson telling his men 'not to spare man, woman or child, [and] not to parley with them' (Plomley, 1966: 268) during the military offensive in 1830. The small number of the Coastal Plains people remaining in 1830 was confirmed when they relayed to Robinson during the first week of November in 1830 that the threat of military action was significant (Plomley, 1966: 264-67). They were not directing their accusations towards the islands for inflicting wholesale destruction upon them. Quite the opposite. They were pointing the blame towards the land frontier, in particular at the activity of soldiers and armed roving parties. When Robinson realised the extent of population decline in the northeast in late 1830, he wrote:

[I]t is evident that only a small remnant of this once formidable race of Aborigines remains My sable companions frequently asked me what had become of the natives, as they had not discovered any traces of them. They supposed that they had been shot by the soldiers (Plomley, 1966: 380).

The clanspeople who met Robinson were from three different nations, and each complained of their treatment at the hands of the military (Plomley, 1966: 380). Moreover, judging from the seventy-two remaining souls of the four great nations – Oyster Bay, Coastal Plains, Penny Royal Creek and Stoney Creek – the great majority

⁶⁷ There were four thousand men, including Governor Arthur, engaged in this military operation that was aimed at forcing the surviving clanspeople into the Tasman Peninsular.

were young men. They did not associate blame for their decline in numbers to violent contact activities at the sea frontier.

* * *

3.3 Mixed Economies: A Liminal Space

This section discusses the emergence of a new Bass Strait island culture with a blending of two worlds. It investigates the relations between the clanswomen and their husbands in terms of adaptations to lifestyle and the maintenance of cultural traditions, as they moved to the small-islands of the Furneaux Group. The developing small-island culture, establishment of new economic activities, and divisions of labour, as well as the settled family lives, will be explored.

3.3.1 The eastern Straitsmen—1820 to 1830.

By 1820 four of the five original mariners remaining on the islands were joined by a number of likeminded men seeking a similar lifestyle. According to Calder (1972, 16) their numbers were never numerous, and over the next decade at least twenty-nine men (Plomley, 1966: 279), (Appendix 1: Tables 1, 2 & 3) found their way to the islands, enticed by the freedoms that isolation from the colonial environment would bring (Plomley and Henley, 1990: 34-70).⁶⁸ This change of lifestyle, from working as river-town sealing crews out of Port Dalrymple and Hobart Town, to living in the remoteness of Bass Strait, brought with it many challenges and adaptations. As mariners the men distinguished themselves geographically and socially as the ‘eastern

⁶⁸ The data that is referred to in Appendix 1: Tables 1, 2 and 3, is taken from Plomley’s and Henley’s records that identify the men who were directly associated with the Furneaux Group of islands. It does not include Kents Group, the western Bass Strait islands, Phillip Island in Victoria, or Kangaroo Island in South Australia.

Straitsmen' (Stokes, 1846b: 449),⁶⁹ and they chose to move to the margins of colonial society initially to continue seal hunting as an occupation.

From 1820⁷⁰ the permanent population of Straitsmen increased in the islands as more of them chose to gain their independence as river town seal hunters. This new breed of men desired to sever the ties of being indentured to colonial merchants in the river town ports, and they tired of the need to go 'cap-in-hand' to the colonial administration for labour on a regular basis (Murray-Smith, 1973: 172). They also realised the dangers attached to the temptation of smuggling on board types of men who were often seeking ways to escape from authority and who proved to be 'troublesome' (Murray-Smith, 1973: 172). The eastern Straitsmen used small wooden whaleboats that restricted crew numbers to between three and five adults, usually under the captaincy of the island headman, to hunt seal between November and January (Ryan, 1996: 66). These voyages often included harvesting the seal colonies along the northeast coast of Trouwunna. As they sailed their vessels across Bass Strait during daylight hours, or by the light of the full moon, they would have been in sight of the Coastal Plains clansmen (Plomley, 1966: 265-66).⁷¹ On making social contact the two cultural groups would continue the traditional exchange and intercultural relations that had been initiated between Briggs and the clans in the previous decade. James Munro told Robinson that the Coastal Plains clans could distinguish between the whaleboat crews from a distance, and that they knew him well. What is more, the

⁶⁹ Stokes commented that the eastern Straitsmen were not sealers by occupation, 'The term sealers is no longer so appropriate as it was formerly; none of them confining themselves to sealing, in consequence of the increasing scarcity of the object of their original pursuit (1846b: 449)

⁷⁰ The increase from the original five residents of the islands, who arrived after 1810, explains Plomley's and Henley's misunderstanding that the number of women was not large in 1830. This was because there was only a small group of men involved in the first ten years.

⁷¹ The clansmen posted lookouts on the high places to watch their borders and coastline for intruders (Plomley, 1966: 265-66)

clanspeople would signal passing whaleboats using smokes to invite the crews ashore (Plomley, 1966: 382–83).⁷² Unlike previous occasions when the clans deliberately avoided strangers and fires were not used as an invitation to meet, now the Clansmen use fire to signal in a deliberate gesture to attract attention and beckon the seamen ashore.

Responding to the signal smokes the Straitsmen who first came to the beachhead were not intruders, but instead beached their boats at the clan's invitation (Plomley, 1966: 383). These earliest contacts were made during a time when Coastal Plains clans were strong in numbers, and they negotiated reciprocal exchange from a position of strength (see 2. 3. 2). Alliances established with the eastern Straitsmen remained amicable throughout the period spanning 1820 to 1826. This was when the eastern Straitsmen were at their greatest numbers, according to Kelly and Hobbs (Calder, 1972: 91). During this timeframe a complex exchange system was established and clanswomen became an important part of the proceedings. This six-year period, over which time the two cultural groups had social contact on a continual basis, was relatively short when one considers that colonial maritime activities around Bass Strait had commenced in 1798.

The accepted method of selecting a wife under clan customary laws was that after agreements between the two parties concerned, the clanswoman would go away with her husband-to-be and after some time together, they would return as husband and wife (Plomley, 1966: 888). It seems that the same traditional practice of

⁷² Robinson wrote that Munro told him that 'all the natives knew him and if they want to see him they would assuredly come to him [and] that the natives are sure to come to a boat and that whenever they saw a boat sailing along the coast they would always make a smoke as a signal for it to come in' (Plomley, 1966: 383)

marriage was accepted by the Straitsmen once they took their women back to the islands, and they were then considered husbands and wives under clan laws. However to the outside world their unions were not to be recognised or understood.

In Trouwunnan society there were two cultural methods of acquiring women in marriage. One was by mutual exchange as described above, and the other by raiding neighbouring nations (Plomley, 1966: 254). Whether the Straitsmen realised all the cultural implications of taking a wife under Trouwunnan law is not revealed, however they were, from the time of agreement, incorporated into the clan kinship system, and that meant they were clearly under traditional law.

The clanswomen who were transported to the islands recognised their new status by choosing a title Tyereelore (Plomley, 1976: 77 and Plomley, 1966: 256),⁷³ and, under traditional law, they belonged to the islands. The Tyereelore did not consider themselves as slaves to the Straitsmen, for from the time they arrived on the islands they called themselves island women, or as Greg Lehman (in Alexander, 2005: 371) refers to them, 'island wives'. This title, Tyereelore, was not just a name, it distinguished the women as a specific group who not only clearly acknowledged their new role and status in their new environment, but also associated them with belonging to a precise geographic location. As Tyereelore the women not only coined this name, it is possible that its origin had no European input.

⁷³ The two words 'Tyerrityer' is translated to island (Plomley, 1976: 275), and 'loreerne' means wife (Plomley, 1976: 472). Robinson translated Tyereelore as 'women of the islands' (Plomley, 1976: 276) and 'the sealers' woman' (Plomley, 1976: 276). Tyereelore has also been translated in more recent times to 'island wives' (Lehman in Alexander, 2005: 371) and I have accepted this term.

3.3.2 From small beginnings.

Robinson's tally of Straitsmen in 1829 (Plomley, 1966: 279, 303-04), accounts for up to thirty men who had been permanently living in the eastern Bass Strait islands from about 1820 (Appendix 1: Tables 2 & 3). Assuming that the majority of these Straitsmen had acquired a clan wife, the Tyereelore would be of similar number. James Munro relayed to Robinson that he and other Straitsmen had initially chosen their women 'principally to gratify' their sexual needs (Plomley, 1966: 334), and this was the primary focus of early exchange proceedings with the Coastal Plains clansmen. If these women were merely the objects of sexual gratification then it appears that it was mutual. They demonstrated a desire to please their husbands at the earliest opportunity, when the Straitsmen were otherwise occupied on a short sealing trip, by catching, skinning, pegging out and drying up to 1,000 wallaby skins (Plomley, 1966: 324). On their return to their respective islands the Straitsmen were surprised to see the outcome of their wives' industrious activity (Plomley, 1966: 324). Perhaps they also recognised that the Tyereelore had talents that far exceeded mutual sexual gratification, as these women proved they were far more critical not only as wives but to the small-island economies.

Assuming the Tyereelore followed clan customs they would not have used guns or spears to hunt wallaby. The eastern Straitsmen obviously appreciated their wife's methods and talents at controlling their dogs to hunt, catch and kill the wallaby, and their ability to accumulate and process large quantities of skins over a relative short period of time (Plomley, 1966: 324). Dogs became an important part of reciprocal exchange agreements between the Straitsmen and clanspeople (Ryan,

1966: 67-8): The Tyereelores' worth to the small-island economy is exemplified by the tally of skins they accumulated without being forced by their husbands to do so.

Wallaby hunting and processing was not a labour intensive activity, as demonstrated by the small number of island wives who had quickly acquired a significant quantity of skins, however it probably required a large number of dogs (Plomley, 1966: 179 & 272). If Munro is to be believed, the Tyereelore volunteered their service to make a substantial contribution to the economy, and were not coerced by their husbands into future exploits (Plomley, 1966: 324). From their earliest attempts to please their husbands and make a contribution to their small-island economy, the Tyereelore abilities of hunting with dogs, and the stockpiling of a new important resource, a benchmark was set for an expectation that they would continue to contribute to the trade in skins. The development of, and responsibility for, each small-island economy was successful because the Straitsmen and the Tyereelore worked together. They transported the Coastal Plains economic practice –men the hunters of big game, and women the harvesters of small game –to working concurrently in separate geographic locations as economic partners. The adaptations were the economy of scale located on islands and marine environments, rather than plains and coast. The Straitsmen were a particular type of men who were prepared to live independent lives, and to connect with the clanspeople not only through kinship obligations, but through also adopting clan rules and practices.

Munro claimed that by 1830 there were about twenty-five clanswomen and twenty Straitsmen living in the Bass Strait Islands (Plomley, 1966: 457). Further, he admitted that five or six of these women had been taken by force, however twenty

had agreed to go with the Straitsmen. Munro is implicit in his view that the women who were not willing to go with the Straitsmen went under duress, rather than being forcibly abducted. Munro also believed that, of the twenty-five clanswomen taken to the islands, all but about three were happy to be there (Plomley, 1966: 457). Considering that the number of Straitsmen probably matched with twenty Tyereelore, the remaining five or six clanswomen were most likely seasonal workers. Furthermore, if Munro is to be believed, the clanswomen were not taken to the islands as 'slaves' (Plomley, 1966: 324) as Robinson continually insisted they were. The majority agreed to go as wives.

Between the months of June to November 1830 Robinson experienced limited personal association with some Straitsmen who were harvesting seals on the northwest coast. Several of these men Robinson judged to be 'civil' and were not abusive to their women (Plomley, 1966: 180). He was satisfied that the Tyereelore who accompanied these Straitsmen had not been seized or obtained through violent means. They were well looked after, happy with their lifestyle, and would only get flogged if they told lies (Plomley, 1966: 179-80). One of the Straitsmen crews, comprising Robert Rhew, David Kelly and Edward Tomlin, along with their wives and children, were to see a different side of Robinson when they met him again in the eastern straits a few months later. However, at this initial meeting Robinson did not indicate any sign of the utter loathing towards the same Straitsmen that would pervade his judgment when he reached the eastern islands. By late November his change of attitude towards the Straitsmen was strategic rather than objective.

3.3.3 Judgment from the outside.

By the end of 1830 Robinson could find nothing positive to record about the Straitsmen. He denigrated them as cruel masters who had obtained clanswomen by violent means and at every opportunity he solicited information that would reinforce that portrayal. He continually interrogated some of his Tyereelore guides about their treatment by the Straitsmen and they stated that they were treated brutally if they stole food, such as biscuit and sugar, or did not do their jobs properly like catching wallaby for their skins (Plomley, 1966: 256-57). There is no doubt that some of the women were punished severely, especially for stealing. However, one extremely violent account, purportedly that of a Straitsman shooting a Tyereelore because she had not cleaned the muttonbirds properly (Plomley, 256-57), left an indelible stain on the character of all the Straitsmen. Even though this cruel act of cold-blooded murder cannot be condoned, it is an exceptionally tragic circumstance that was not normal practice. What is puzzling is why Robinson did not insist that Everett, the man allegedly responsible for the shooting, be brought to face colonial justice for his actions. Robinson seized upon this report to convince Governor Arthur to remove the Tyereelore from their 'cruel masters', and return them to the clansmen who he was leading into exile.

When it came to the Straitsmen, Calder argued that Robinson always painted their reputation 'as disadvantageously as he could', giving the 'very worst accounts' that were not always confirmed 'in every particular' by witnesses 'who knew them [the Straitsmen] quite so well as he did'. Robinson's negative characterisations of the Straitsmen were to be countered by Captain James Kelly and James Hobbs who knew the Straitsmen more intimately, and over a longer period of time than

Robinson. Calder wrote that though Kelly and Hobbs 'loudly denounced the brutality of some of them, they accompany their testimony, as to their original possession of native women, with some slightly palliative circumstances' (Calder, 1972: 14-5). It seems that Robinson was very selective with what he reported regarding the treatment of the clanswomen by the Straitsmen, thus his version was blurred by a biased view.

Robinson was not impressed when Kelly and Hobbs testified that 'many of the women preferred living on the islands [and though] not always willing to go, after a time preferred stopping on the islands of the straits' (Calder, 1972: 14-5). Calder reasoned that Robinson's hatred of the Straitsmen caused him to overlook, or be ignorant of, the bartering system whereby the clansmen agreed to the exchange their women for the carcasses of seal and hunting dogs (Calder, 1972: 14-5). According to Calder's source, Robinson was 'quite fortified' that the two witnesses asserted that the women were 'attained by purchase' from willing clansmen, even though it was 'A practice which in those days was not confined to them, but was universal' (Calder, 1972: 15). Calder was critical of Robinson not acknowledging this method of acquiring women, stating that he 'skirts the question of this traffic in women' that had been confirmed by Kelly and Hobbs (Calder, 1972: 13-5). Robinson was scathing in his judgment that the Tyereelore were 'carried off [and] kept in slavery' (Calder, 1972: 14), and he had no consideration or empathy with the fact that the Tyereelore were the 'mothers of the sealers children' (Calder, 1972: 15). Kelly and Hobbs were independent witnesses and had no reason to embellish their

version of the character and practice of the Straitsmen, however it is not always their more credible versions that have captured the imagination of the writers of history.

Further, some have argued that the clanswomen were acquired for their ability to catch seals (Adam-Smith, 1963: 59), however this is not the case as confirmed by Munro (Plomley, 1966: 324) who asserted that initially the Tyereelore did not accompany them on sealing voyages.

3.3.4 Following clan traditions of reciprocity.

Clanswomen were exchanged for commodities of equal cultural value such as dogs (Plomley, 1966: 272),⁷⁴ seal carcasses and muttonbirds (Ryan, 1996: 67-9; Stokes, 1846b: 450). However, it appears that it was not just the reciprocal value of the exchange that was important. The exchange may also be linked to clan survival. Aside from the provision of dogs, the harvesting of seals and muttonbirds were usually the provenance of the clanswomen. Thus as the number of Coastal Plains clanswomen relocating to the islands increased their loss to the clans would have resulted in an acute shortage of a ready supply of these two vital food resources. Therefore reciprocal agreements ensured that the Straitsmen and Tyereelore provided an alternative supply of nutritionally rich traditional foods. Additional items of equal economic and social value to the clanspeople included favoured European items such as flour, sugar, tea, and tobacco, all of which were expensive commodities in colonial society (Nicholls, 1977: 127). The clansmen prized both blankets and dogs for warmth and the latter, not just as close companions, but to aid them with hunting

⁷⁴ Dogs were certainly highly valued by the clanspeople, and were treated like members of the family, providing warmth at night and assisting with hunting game. In colonial society dogs were also extremely valuable as Knopwood mentioned paying twenty-five pounds (equivalent to a years salary in 1807) for one dog, and eight pounds for another, in 1807. He also offered a ten pounds reward for the return of his favourite female hunting dog, *Miss*, who had gone missing (Nicholls, 1977:125, 146 & 122).

big game. Dogs were treated as family members and were found in great numbers amongst the clans (Plomley, 1966: 261-62) and the islands (Begg and Begg, 1979: 59-62). In addition to their small-island economic enterprises that were established the Straitsmen and Tyereelore did not neglect their Coastal Plains families. Furthermore, the clansmen would have been content to continue their traditional management of country and hunting big game on the coastal plains.

Initially the Straitsmen must have bargained to acquire the most culturally valuable and desirable females,⁷⁵ and indeed a bungunna's daughter⁷⁶ must have met both these qualities. Mannalargenna was an esteemed bungunna who was held in the greatest regard by most of the Trouwunnan clans, thus exploring his motivation for allowing his daughters to live in the islands is particularly significant. It may have been Mannalargenna's strategy to directly link the Straitsmen to him as relatives, and his daughters provided this connection. Mannalargenna would have been aware of what he was doing when he negotiated the exchange of his daughters to become Tyereelore. In doing so he probably elevated his status amongst the Straitsmen. It seems unlikely that Mannalargenna realised in advance that his daughters and sister would be safer as island wives than in the clan country that was about to come under

⁷⁵ It was not only clanswomen who were bought and sold as valuable 'chattels'. During this time, European women were not plentiful at the colonial frontier or in the towns. Purchase of females for labour and common-law marriage was an accepted practice with the arrival of female convicts at Hobart Town whereby colonial authority allowed women to be bought for a number of ewes and bottles of rum (Travers, 1968: 53; Calder, 1972: 15; Shaw, 1971: 47 & 273). Some liaisons became permanent and were bonded through marriage whilst others ended with resale to keen buyers. Therefore it was not only Trouwunnan women who were bought and sold as valuable 'chattels'. Furthermore, it was not only the men on the islands who made advances to the clans for women, or were invited to participate in exchange of valuable commodities. Others at the land frontier must have either negotiated exchange with the clans, or raided the campsites to steal women and children.

⁷⁶ Mannalargenna exchanged at least three of his four daughters and a sister with the eastern Straitsmen who became Tyereelore.

siege from the land frontier. However, as conflict at the frontier intensified in the late 1820s, their being safer on the islands proved to be the case.

According to Ryan, when mutual negotiations were completed the Straitsmen and clanspeople sealed their agreements with ceremonial dancing, singing and feasting at the beachhead (Ryan, 1990: 67). Celebrations such as these followed long established Trouwunnan cultural practices that were governed by clan laws. It was customary for women to move to their husband's nation (Plomley, 1966: 312 & 888), and it was this custom that was to be honoured with the movement of clanswomen across to the islands to become island wives. The resulting agreements made at the sea frontier meant that the Straitsmen and clansmen were equally answerable to, and responsible for, the ramifications of breaking alliances and kinship ties that were linked to customary marriage laws (Ryan, 1966: 69). These clan laws were not legally binding under colonial law, nor were they recognised by many in colonial society who considered the clanswomen and Straitsmen to be master and slave.

3.3.5 A new mixed economy: furs and feathers.

The men who made their permanent homes on the Furneaux Group of islands did not call themselves 'sealers'. They were the eastern Straitsmen (Stokes, 1846b: 449). The Straitsmen combined both land- and sea-based activities from their island homes as they continued to hunt seal on a limited seasonal basis. By this time (1820-1830) the seal numbers were tenuous and the season only lasted for about two months (Plomley, 1966: 305), with the rest of the year was taken up, among other types of hunting expeditions, with raising vegetable gardens and crops, and tending to their animals. The Straitsmen received an average income of about fifteen pounds for

their annual harvest of seals (Plomley, 1966: 304). Consequently, the small island communities could not be supported by a mono-economy centred on a trade in skins. According to Robinson, 'these men cannot live by sealing alone and ... are dependent upon these slaves [the Tyereelore] for their subsistence' (Plomley, 1966: 303). Robinson conveniently ignored the importance of the land-based economic and subsistence farming abilities of the Straitsmen who developed large domestic garden plots, cultivated crops and raised a variety of livestock on the islands. The men did not rely on sealing for a living nor did they rely entirely upon their wives for their survival.

There were four islands in the southern reaches of the Furneaux Group occupied by the Straitsmen and Tyereelore on a permanent basis. They were Gun Carriage Island, Clark Island, Woody Island, and Preservation Island (see Appendix 2: Map 5). Each of these islands contained, or was adjacent to, extensive muttonbird rookeries. Calder reiterates Robinson's views that the clanswomen were considered as slaves and concubines (1972: 11–15), and these sentiments were echoed by the *Launceston Advertiser* (11 October, 1830). It reported that slavery was 'forcing them [the Tyereelore] to do what they abhor'. One opinion was prejudiced and the other was written from a distance without input from the Tyereelore or the Straitsmen.

From the early 1820s the exploitation of an abundant resource was introduced into the Bass Strait island economy. It was the mass harvesting of muttonbirds for their feathers. The cultural harvesting skills of clanswomen (Ryan, 1996: 70) provided the catalyst for the transition to the new feather economy. This new resource,

subsidised by seal, wallaby and kangaroo skins, became the mainstay of island life (Ryan, 1996: 69). The introduction of a new product required an extension of the early exchange agreements in order to acquire additional workers for the viability of an industry that provided a short window of opportunity. The adult muttonbirds returned to the islands on dusk and left at dawn for about a four-month period and the feather season coincided with this period.

These additional clanswomen, who were part of this new exchange might be identified as 'Wanapakalalea' (Plomley, 1976: 477),⁷⁷ became the seasonal workers on the small islands. The Wanapakalalea were not Tyereelore. They had a different role and status to the wives and with their assistance the traditional practice of harvesting the adult muttonbirds for food was tailored so as to become an important extension of the island economy. Feathers were also an important addition to colonial trade, while it is assumed that some of the carcasses were eaten, and the surplus fed to the dogs there would be very little waste to dispose of.

Captain James Kelly, and seaman James Hobbs, both testified that many women were engaged through a system of barter (Calder, 1972: 91) in the islands to work the muttonbird season both trapping the adults and plucking the feathers. The Wanapakalalea became an important new addition to the island economy. Their cultural practice of trapping the adult muttonbirds was transported with them from their country (Ryan, 1996: 70). They became skilled at the laborious job of plucking the feathers throughout the summer months. Munro appears to have been one of the

⁷⁷ Trouwunnan language Wanapakalalea translates to 'workers' or 'labourers' (Plomley, 1976: 477) and is used in this paper to identify the seasonal workers in the islands from the Tyereelore.

first of the Straitsmen to exploit this new resource, engaging up to six Wanapakalalea during the feather season.

In order to accumulate large quantities of feathers the Wanapakalalea were required to trap, smother and pluck the adult muttonbirds. The method they employed was to dig a deep pit near the birds' launching rocks enclosing the front with a tussock barrier to prevent the birds from escaping (Stokes, 1846b: 452). As daylight broke the adult birds that had gathered in their many hundreds around the launching rocks to prepare for flight, were trapped as they fell into the pits. The birds were then covered with tussock grass (Plomley, 1966: 256) and after they smothered their feathers were plucked and bagged. Some of the muttonbird carcasses were smoked for human consumption (Stokes, 1846b: 452-53), with the remainder fed to their many dogs (Plomley, 1966: 272). According to one observer in 1825, the Wanapakalalea plucked the feathers of as many as 500 adult muttonbirds each a day, and the feathers were bagged to sell for flour and spirits (Begg and Begg, 1979: 60-1).⁷⁸ We can imagine how many adult muttonbirds were taken to provide enough feathers to support the small island economy. However, the exploitation of birds for their feathers appear not to affected their numbers as John Boulton in 1825 (Begg and Begg, 1979: 61), and Robinson in 1830 (Plomley, 1966: 255), noted seeing in the straits many millions of muttonbirds flying overhead for more than an hour.

The eastern Straitsmen, who reportedly had two or three Wanapakalalea with them at any one time (Plomley, 1966: 269), apart from negotiating a supply of clanswomen for the task, were in reality sidelined in this economic pursuit. It

⁷⁸ Parish told Robinson that muttonbird feathers sold for five pence to sixpence per pound and it took the feathers of twenty-five birds to produce a pound (Plomley, 1966: 236).

appears that it was the Tyereelore who controlled this new labour intensive industry, at least while the men continued to hunt seals, as the two seasons coincided. Ryan (1996: 69) states 'women had become the social guardians and economic exponents of a new society', and her point is significant in both instances. The introduction of additional clanswomen into the island economy was not to assist the Straitsmen in the seasonal seal hunt, nor was it to satisfy 'sex starved' men (Adam-Smith, 1965: 59) as it has been represented. The Wanapakalalea were in the islands primarily to assist the Tyereelore to exploit the adult muttonbirds for their feathers.

Kelly and Hobbs suggested that the women (the Wanapakalalea) stayed in the islands for the muttonbird feather season, as it was when the birds grew 'lean' that they were 'best for plucking the feathers' (Begg and Begg, 1979: 60). For about three months over the feather season the Straitsmen would have been absent hunting seal leaving the women to pluck the birds. Just as clanswomen were the managers of the muttonbird resource in Trouwunna society, it is likely that the Tyereelore considered the muttonbird rookeries, and the feather labour force, their own domain in island society. This being the case, the Wanapakalalea would have had a lower status as labourers than the Tyereelore who were the bosses, which may have caused resentment amongst the seasonal workers. Perhaps this is the reason that some of these women attempted to return to their country. One report told of five clanswomen, accompanied by two clansmen, being tragically drowned when their boat was wrecked as they were attempting to return to their country in 1824/25. Three others were drowned trying to swim from Swan Island to the coast of Tebrikunna in 1827 (Plomley, 1966: 257). These women may well have been

Wanapakalalea women leaving at the end of their seasonal work or attempting to escape work on the islands.

For over the six-month season, muttonbirds provided a rich harvest of fresh eggs, and smoked and salted birds, that were highly nutritious (Alexander, 2005: 7), and the extra seasonal workers would have been provided for with minimal impact on the small-island economies. This would not have been the case during the off-season when leaner times prevailed, and extra people would put pressure on their meagre provisions. It is therefore likely that over the winter and spring season the Wanapakalalea would eagerly await reconnecting with family and country. These seasonal arrangements were probably settled in advance and the Wanapakalalea would return to the islands when the adult birds returned from their migration at the end of September.

Calder reiterated Robinson's persistent reporting that the clanswomen were 'bought off fathers and husbands' (1972: 11–15), and that he could not bring himself to accept that the arrangements made at the beachhead had followed established cultural practice. Robinson would be affronted if he thought that Mannalargenna had any agreed role in the provision of labour, in addition to wives, to the Straitsmen. However, it was at the behest of clan bungunnas such as Mannalargenna (Ryan, 1996: 67) that these exchanges took place. They should take a shared responsibility for the social consequences of these arrangements, as the need for additional clanswomen rapidly increased sometime in the early 1820s, to support the labour intensive feather industry. Could the clansmen be held accountable as instruments of their own demise because they were willing partners to these agreements or were

there other forces at work that they were yet to see the effects of? Ryan (1996: 71) argues that it was the Straitsmen who were the instruments 'in the destruction in a number of Aboriginal tribes ... through exchange and abduction of women'. Ryan continues by saying that the Straitsmen 'saved Aboriginal Tasmanian society from extinction because their economic activities enabled some of its traditions to continue' (1996: 71). This conclusion omits the role and status of the Tyereelore who should be recognised for their part in ensuring the continuity of traditional cultural practices. They should also be accredited for their initiative and adaptability in accommodating a small-island lifestyle.

Robinson noted in his journal that there were three seasonal activities: kangaroo hunting, muttonbird plucking and sealing and that the skins were sold 'to merchants [by the Straitsmen] in return [for] sugar and flour on which they [the Tyereelore and the Wanapakalalea] live whilst they are engaged in plucking mutton-bird feathers' (Plomley, 1966, 405). He obviously did not want to recognise that the feather industry was as important, if not more important, than the trade in skins. Although he does acknowledge, probably without realising, that the women and their children got the benefits of the trade—flour and sugar—during the feather season. The recognition and acknowledgment of a mixed economy (Stewart, 1997: 15) is critically important when it comes to understanding the emergence of independent small-island communities. It is not an economy solely reliant upon marketing seal and kangaroo skins, and as biased as Robinson was, he actually described the dynamic mixed economy.

3.3.6 A small-island culture emerges.

These small-island communities emerged as the two different cultural groups blended. The Straitsmen and Tyereelore developed a way of life that combined their abilities, knowledge and customs, which enabled them to survive and thrive. The Tyereelore transported knowledge of surviving in wild placescapes as clan resource managers. They could operate independently, and were resilient to change (Ryan, 1996: 69). They had clearly understood their role and position in clan society and transferred these responsibilities with them to the small island culture (Ryan, 1996: 69). The Straitsmen were strong in their resolve to live an independent life, were masters of the marine environment, and they passed on these skills to their boys (Stokes, 1846b: 451). Without persistence and resilience on both sides it would have been difficult to survive as permanent occupants in the remoteness of Bass Strait.

The small island homes were chosen for several important reasons. Each of the islands had access to a supply of fresh water, sheltered harbours, and safe anchorages for the small wooden whaleboats (Begg and Begg, 1979: 60). What is more, commencing with the arrival of Briggs about 1812, there was obviously a decision not to utilise the established facilities in Kent Bay. The Straitsmen selected essential equipment (Adams-Smith, 1978: 16-7; Brothers *et al*, 2001: 284) from Kent Bay, which they transferred to the small islands to support their economic enterprises. By 1830, seal hunting had reached a point where the men no longer relied on the seasonal harvest as an economic pursuit (Plomley, 1966: 303 & 405), and whilst the island homes were probably not selected initially for their close

proximity to major muttonbird rookeries, their convenient location was to be soon realised.

Windswept and rugged, the four main islands⁷⁹ chosen as permanent homes were to become, what Munro so eloquently described, placescapes where the Straitsmen would find 'contentment' (Plomley, 1966: 269, and Begg and Begg, 1979: 62). To prepare for an independent life, the Straitsmen constructed dwellings out of split timber with thatching of tussock grass (Stokes, 1846a: 266), dug wells and planted crops of wheat, barley, potatoes, cabbage and peas (O'May, 1959b: 20). On Gun Carriage Island Robinson reported in 1830/31 the production of twenty-five tons of potatoes and 150 pigs (Plomley, 1966: 325), while on Preservation Island he saw 'excellent crops' of wheat, barley and potatoes (Plomley, 1966: 269). These crops and stock numbers are clear evidence that the Straitsmen were not left idle between catching seals and hunting kangaroo for skins, while their wives did all the work. Early sketches of these small island homes depict neatness and order with fenced vegetable plots and huts on the lea side located close to sweeping sandy boat harbours (Plomley, 1987: 34 & 98). The Straitsmen tended to animals such as pigs, goats, sheep and chickens, while their wives harvested a variety of wild foods from the surrounding seas and islands to supplement their diet (Begg and Begg, 1979: 61). With the scarcity of trees on the smaller islands, the men and women collected their firewood from the nearby larger islands, and transported the supply by whaleboat back to their small island homes (Plomley, 1966: 269). The collection of firewood is

⁷⁹ These islands included Gun Carriage, Woody, Clarke and Preservation islands with several families living on each island.

one example where the men and women worked together to provide for their domestic needs.

The clanswomen's knowledge of and skills to harvest wild produce took on a new form as they adapted traditional skills to suit a settled island lifestyle. The economy of scale differed vastly from traditional practice, yet they were still able to satisfy their needs in this new environment. They harvested, processed and salted, barrels of young muttonbirds during the 'oiling season' (*Hobart Town Gazette*, 25 March, 1826), collected muttonbird, swan, and goose eggs, and gathered a range of other wild foods for their subsistence (Plomley, 1966: 256-57; Begg and Begg: 1979: 60). The Straitsmen and Tyereelore were very adept at exploiting every opportunity so as to continue their shared island lifestyle. Indeed, given the range of economic enterprises pursued throughout the seasonal cycles, they had entrepreneurial skills that have not been fully acknowledged or appreciated until now.

The Tyereelore were taught by their husbands to speak English and were bestowed with nicknames,⁸⁰ some of which were endearing, although to those on the outside they were not considered to be complimentary or feminine. They have been described as 'sometimes ludicrously absurd' (Shaw, 1971, 274). In their new homes the Tyereelore did not abandon important cultural traditions and they maintained close connections with country, their spirituality, and kin. During his stay in the islands in the late 1830s John Lort Stokes (1842b: 451) remarked that the Straitsmen's wives resisted the adoption of Christianity and instead maintained strong connections to their spirit world, believing 'of the transmigration of souls ...

⁸⁰ It should be noted that many of the clanswomen names were difficult to pronounce and nicknames would have been easily recognised.

[and] nothing could induce [them] to think otherwise' (Stokes, 1846b: 451). The women demonstrated their independence and freedom to continue their traditional belief systems.

Many Tyereelore adopted the terminology of their husband's culture, such as using the expression of endearment 'honey' when they addressed both those on the islands and their clanspeople. This word 'honey', Robinson observed, was 'used by the natives of the east and by the women of the islands as a call to attention in the same way as the lower order of Irish use it, which denotes the same as my dear among the white people' (Plomley, 1966: 366). Although Robinson was loathed to show that those he called the 'hardened men' (the Straitsmen) had any feelings or affection, he did record them on occasions 'shedding tears' in response to receiving news of the drowning of their friends (Plomley, 1966: 224). Stokes (1846b: 450) presented quite a different picture to Robinson by saying that the wives of the Straitsmen were their 'sweethearts', and he personally observed a more human side of the Straitsmen's relations with the Tyereelore. Such romantic terms, that radiate the warmth of loving and caring relations, are forgotten in the passage of time, and have instead been replaced by inverted reflections of a cold and heartless past.⁸¹

Tyereelore modified the austere design of traditional cloaks or mantles, by tanning and sewing together wallaby, kangaroo and possum skins to make long skin frocks for themselves, and great coats (Plomley, 1966: 295), capes and moccasin

⁸¹ It should be noted that even though Stokes visited the islands in the late 1830s and early 1840s, that those people he described were the original Straitsmen and their wives who were then aging, and their children.

style footwear for their husbands (Begg and Begg, 1979: 61)⁸². Skins were also sewn together to make sleeping rugs that often brought high prices in the river towns (Plomley, 1966: 395 & 97). The Tyereelore were 'excellent hunters [but] dirty domestics and worse cooks', according to Howell (Mollison and Everitt, 1976: 1827). The island wives had obviously not placed housekeeping duties on the same level of priority as they had their work in the rookeries. However, they had adapted to living a predominantly settled lifestyle.

Although the small Bass Strait islands became their new homes, life was not confined to domestic duties and economic pursuits. The Tyereelore were capable assistants to their husbands on boating expeditions (Plomley, 1966: 295), that often culminated in their visiting country, where the Straitsmen took advantage of kangaroo hunting seasons (Plomley, 1966: 405). The Tyereelore were not totally cut off from their kin as they not only made regular visits to their country, they also kept in contact using smoke to signal the mainland, signals that would be returned from the high hills of Tebrikunna (Plomley, 1966: 266). However, there was also resistance to changing some traditional practices and beliefs as the Tyereelore continued to perform ceremonies through song and dance. Their new stories were associated with the spirits of the 'blue fire' and the 'devils' or amorphous spirits who lived in the islands (Plomley, 1966: 266, 295, & 300). There is no doubt that the island women believed that there were many devils or spirits that lived in the islands and that they had close association with these Beings through song, dance and ceremony. The Tyereelore also continued the practice of cutting cicatrices into their

⁸² John Boulton wrote of his visit to the island homes, as a passenger on the *Sally* in 1824, five years before Robinson arrived in the straits to cast his critical eye on the families.

skin. These were new designs in the shape of circles with transverse lines, usually placed on their backs and thighs, and they were 'very fond' of them (Plomley, 1966: 581). It was Stokes who observed that this resistance to desist their traditional ways was theirs by choice and not because their husbands had neglected to tutor them in Christian ideology as some historical accounts suggest.

3.3.7 The fathers were the teachers of books and boats.

By 1826 there were about twenty children on the islands (*Hobart Town Gazette*, 8 April, 1826), and it was the Straitsmen fathers who taught their children to read and write. They also provided their children with religious instruction. 'Their fathers, I am happy to say, give them all the instruction in their power', wrote Stokes (1846b: 451). Stokes added that among the children were 'some fine looking boys' and many can read the Bible, and a few write', he was impressed by these children.

When we were at Preservation Island, there was a young woman on her way, in company with her father, to Port Dalrymple to be married to an European; and I afterwards learned from the clergyman there, that he had not for some time seen a young person who appeared to be so well aware of the solemn vow she was making (Stokes, 1846 b: 451)

The Straitsmen also ensured that their children were christened and when the opportunity allowed, they attended church services to be married (Stokes, 1846b: 451). The fathers obviously taught the children well as several outside observers have confirmed. They did not just make a pretence of educating their children, and their children responded accordingly, especially the girls.

Munro stated in 1830 that there were about nine children aged between one and fourteen years old living with their parents on the various islands (Plomley, 1966: 457). His list probably did not include the ten girls living in Launceston aged

between twelve and seventeen years old, most of whom were identified in February 1831 (Plomley, 1966: 446-47). These girls were from two lists, one from 1827 and the other from February 1831. Four girls listed in 1827, Esther Scott, Mary Ann Brown, Catherine Anderson and [Ms] Dobson, were not included on the 1831 list that included Margaret Thomas, Mary Briggs, Nancy Smith, Maria Harrington, Jane Foster, and Eliza Briggs (Plomley, 1966: 446-447). The combined lists indicate that the girls fathers, and perhaps their mothers, considered it a desirable practice to allow their early to late teenage daughters to spend time in colonial river towns, possibly due to the limitations for girls of finding work on the small islands. The reason for sending the girls away may also have been for schooling, as John Boulton was told in 1824 (Begg and Begg, 1979: 62), although he was of the opinion the children were sent to Sydney Town government schools.⁸³ Their circumstances were not always approved of by colonial bystanders, as one colonial newspaper wrote that many guardians of the young women were of questionable character, but there may have been very few options available for 'halfcaste' (*Colonial Times*, 1 June, 1831) girls to find work and board in a stratified colonial society. It is curious that only the older girls were living in the colonial towns, and there is no mention by Munro of the older boys, however, it is possible that they remained in the islands to help their fathers work the whaleboats as Stokes observed in 1842. Stokes was impressed by the abilities of the young boys, whom he considered made 'excellent sailors, and excel as headmen in whalers, where their dexterity in throwing the spear, render them most formidable harpooners' (Stokes, 1842b: 451). The Straitsmen built and

⁸³ This seems to be due to a misunderstanding by Boulton (probably the word 'town') as there are no records of the children going to Sydney Town for schooling or work.

repaired their boats using Cape Barren pine trees to fashion masts, steering oars and timbers (Plomley, 1966: 270), skills which they passed on to the boys. Stokes added that if he was not at the end of his journey he would 'have taken one of them in the *Beagle*' with him (Stokes, 1842b: 451). Although his visit to the islands was when the Straitsmen were aged, Stokes, following on from Boulton's observations of 1824, provides us with a window of opportunity to see the influence that both parents had had on the next generation.

3.3.8 Trading the surplus.

The island surplus supplies of home grown produce and collected material resources, were traded for materials and provisions not available there (Plomley, 1966: 405). Colonial towns such as Launceston and Port Dalrymple were the closest important trading points to the Bass Strait islands. The Straitsmen sailed their small wooden whaleboats along the northeast coast to Port Dalrymple and Launceston at least twice a year (Stokes, 1846a: 280). These voyages were essential to ensuring their economic survival in the remote islands. They traded a variety of goods, including sealskins, kangaroo and wallaby skins, mutton-bird feathers (Stokes, 1846a: 280), fur rugs, gemstones, surplus vegetables, and strings of shells, for essential supplies that were not readily available on the islands (Plomley, 1966: 405; Ryan, 1996: 70; Stokes, 1846b: 453). A wide range of goods was taken back to the islands, including flour, sugar, tobacco, and other items needed to last at least six months.⁸⁴ Boulton witnessed in 1824 that they also traded their skins with passing ships for rum (Begg

⁸⁴ Stokes noted that he met with a boatload of 'sealers' from the islands who were anchored near Port Dalrymple in 1842, where they had traded goods for supplies (1846a: 280).

and Begg, 1979: 60), as rum was the usual form of currency in the colony (*Hobart Town Gazette*, 25 March, 1926).

* * *

3. 4 Fractured Alliances

This section traces the events that caused the rifting apart of relations at the colonial sea frontier, between the Coastal Plains people and the eastern Straitsmen, from the first attack to the reprisals that followed. It endeavours to listen to the voices of the people who had been part of a vibrant and extended family, to present a more thorough picture of the gravity that these events had on them. It aims to provide a timeframe when contact relations soured and were subsequently severed on both sides of Banks Strait.

3. 4. 1 The first cracks appear between families at the sea frontier.

The perception that sealers were the primary villains forcibly taking women from their clan fires, presumably within sight of the clansmen, is common in the historical record. The following echoes the false assumptions that had persisted from the very start of the sealing operations in Bass Strait, ‘the sealers massacred many of the Tasmanian aborigines [sic], raping women and clubbing down the menfolk like so many helpless seals’ (Travers, 1986: 117). Travers description suggests that the clansmen were helpless and timid in the face of danger, as does the intimation that the women were raped in front of their terrified men, who waited to be killed like seals. The consequences of killing clansmen and raping women would have been a high price to pay, for as Robinson alludes early in his journal, the clansmen all over the island did not forget an affront that caused them injury or death (Plomley, 1966:

87-8). Accepting that this principle was universal, violent clashes at the beachhead as imagined by Travers between the Straitsmen and clansmen, would have involved breaking traditional laws that had been longstanding, and would have ultimately led to reprisals.

Social interactions between the Straitsmen and the Coastal Plains peoples began on a very small scale after 1810, and increased dramatically after 1820 (see Appendix 1: Tables 1, 2 & 3, and Section 3. 2 above). Over the next four years social contact was regular and relations remained stable, until the first incident in 1824 that marked the turning point away from friendly discourse between the two groups (Calder, 1971: 91). This attack led to a severe rift in relations over the ensuing three years, and by late 1827 the final incident rifted them apart. Two seamen who were closely associated with the Straitsmen families, Kelly and Hobbs, corroborated this timeframe. Amicable exchanges continued until a series of murders took place on both sides, after which time,

[T]he long misunderstanding between sealer and black [led to] several on each side [being] killed ... and the natives grew chary of intercourse with the whites [which] interrupted this species of barter [and] the women could then only be taken using force. [M]any skirmishes took place ... the sealers armed with guns and Aborigines fighting with spears' (Calder, 1972: 91).

These incidents, that Kelly and Hobbs were independently familiar with, clearly put the events into an historic context. The other reliable informant at this time was Alexander McKay, who also had close associations with the small-island communities. McKay spent some time with Robinson in 1830 and 1831, and was closely associated with Calder who wrote about these series of conflicts.

Each attack demarcated points in time when mutual alliances began to break down. These events at the colonial sea frontier have until now remained obscure. The first 'misunderstanding' offers an explanation as to why the reputations of some Straitsmen were cast as raiders of women and killers of clanspeople. Many historical accounts have placed these events out of time and context. Calder mentioned that 'many savage but unrecorded encounters ... took place in the Cape Portland districts and the North East coast' Calder, 1972: 90), around 1825.

It was in early 1824 that a hostile raid was conducted on the Tangumronener clan at Eddystone Point by a boatload of Straitsmen from Gun Carriage Island (Plomley, 1966: 194). Graphic details about this particular event were recalled by two Tyereelore who told Robinson of the Straitsmen's successful abduction of some women from the Eddystone Point beach (Plomley, 1966: 194). The two women, who may have been among those taken that day, said that the men had arrived unannounced at the coast and, before the clansmen were able to intervene,

[T]he sealers rushed them and took several [women], and then anchored their boat off the surf and enticed the natives to the beach and discharged several guns at them, and killed several. One man, when he saw the sealers about to fire, dived under the water and came up and laid hold of the stern post of the boat. They towed him out to sea and when the man let go and was swimming to shore, they fired at him. He dived and they pulled after him and shot him (Plomley, 1966: 194).

Although the women did not identify the perpetrators by name, the main culprit was believed to be Duncan McMillan. McMillan was known as a 'colourful sealer and pirate' of 'unsavoury character' who reputedly, with five other men, had stolen a boat along with a quantity of goods from Hobart Town, and sailed to the straits (O'May, 1959: 26). On the five men reaching the islands, two were apparently

abandoned on an island to be picked up by a passing vessel, and the remaining three, including McMillan, proceeded to Gun Carriage Island (O'May, 1959b: 26). Further, O'May wrote that the authorities knew of McMillan's whereabouts but he was not apprehended because the stolen boat was retrieved, and McMillan remained on Gun Carriage to work with Thomas Tucker (O'May, 1959b: 26-9). McMillan has also been described as being 'mentally deranged' (Travers, 1968: 121), however regardless of his character it seems McMillan was not an escapee from the penal colony, but merely a common thief.

From the women's recollections, this first violent foray upon the clan at Eddystone Point left several clansmen dead and a number of women were abducted and taken to the islands (Plomley, 1966: 194). The attack was obviously unexpected, and unprovoked by the clansmen, and they no doubt waited for the opportunity to revenge these killings and the abduction of their women. This attack explains why Calder (1972: 92 & 94) mentioned that McMillan had 'frequent feuds' with the Coastal Plains clans and that they 'hated' him, and Tucker would have known the risks of engaging such unsavoury types.

The motivation behind McMillan's foray on the Tangumronener clanspeople is unclear as he already had a wife, Pernappertitenner, nicknamed 'Duncan', with whom he shared a young child (Plomley, 1966: 194). It is more likely that he was on a mission to acquire women for his crew, and whether he deliberately planned this as a raiding attack or not, his actions broke customary law between allies that had worked to the mutual advantage of the Coastal Plains clans and the Straitsmen for over a decade.

The Coastal Plains people may have been susceptible to being raided once, but it would have been imprudent of the Straitsmen to conduct a second raid, as the clansmen would surely have been on their guard. This particular episode of violence, that was pivotal in the breakdown of relations at the sea frontier, has not rated a mention in the literature. But for the women's account in Robinson's journal, and an obscure mention by Calder in 1874 (Plomley, 1966: 437 note 16),⁸⁵ this incident would have been forgotten entirely.

3. 4. 2 The clansmen's retribution.

The Straitsmen's next expedition to Eddystone Point took place in late 1824, with the Gun Carriage crew departing on another mission to acquire more clanswomen for the single men on the island (Plomley, 1966: 437). The crew included Tucker, McMillan and his wife Pernappertitenner and their young son, together with two others, William Saunders and John Cliff (Adam-Smith, 1965: 60). Calder believed that Saunders and Cliff were Aborigines from New South Wales (Calder, 1972: 90), however this has not been verified.

After beaching the whaleboat near Georges Rocks, three men and the woman went in search of the clan. Tucker remained on the beach (Plomley, 1966: 192 & 437), probably to watch the boat and look after the child. As several days passed he became concerned for his companions who had not returned. Tucker repeatedly fired off a gun (Calder, 1972: 92-4) to signal his impatience at their being overdue, but there was no response.

⁸⁵ Plomley noted that Calder had referred to this incident in a letter to the *Hobart Mercury*, 6 July, 1874. Calder wrote that the reprisal by the clansmen on McMillan was a 'revenge for an attack on some natives in which some women were taken away and some men killed by a party' (Plomley, 1966: 437)

Eventually McMillan's wife appeared accompanied by several of her clan, and after Tucker questioned her about the three men she announced that they had all been speared (Plomley, 1966: 194; Shaw, 1971: 275). Tucker had apparently bargained for his life (Calder, 1972: 92-4), and the fact that the clansmen allowed Tucker to leave unharmed, suggests that Tucker was not involved in the previous attack. But whether Tucker was aware that this was an act of reprisal in response to the previous raid, is not known. The clansmen provided the necessary help in the usual manner, offering the assistance of some clanswomen to launch his boat (Plomley, 1966: 193-94). Pernappertittenner did not take Tucker's offer to leave with him, preferring to stay with her clanspeople.

Tucker later stated that after his boat was launched and before he had a chance to take Pernappertittenner and McMillan's young son onboard, one of the clansmen, Murray, raised the boy above his head and dashed his brains against the rocks in clear view of his mother (Plomley, 1966: 194). Why Tucker would want to take the boy with him when Pernappertittenner indicated she was staying is puzzling, however, when Robinson recorded the version told to him in 1830 this may have been resolved. Robinson was told Pernappertittenner's side of the story by several clanswomen. She had said that after telling Tucker she was not leaving with him, he 'seized hold of it [the child] and beat its brains out. The man set the mizzen and steered for the island' (Plomley, 1966: 192). If Robinson's informants are to be believed, it was Tucker who brutally murdered the child in full view of his mother and the rest of the clan.

Tucker recognised two of the clansmen present as Jack and Murray, both of whom had visited the islands and accompanied him on previous seal hunting expeditions (Calder, 1972: 92–4). Assuming that Tucker was guilty of the brutal death of Pernappertitterner's young boy, as Robinson's records suggest, any revenge was not to do with the child's death. Jack and Murray were both involved in the men's death and witnesses to the child's murder. Tucker marked them both for future revenge, perhaps to prevent them from revealing the events that occurred at the beachhead in late 1824, or for their part in killing the three Straitsmen. Most historic accounts about this incident have held Murray responsible for the killing of the boy, and have neglected to acknowledge the previous abduction of women and killing of clansmen by McMillan. Pernappertitterner, who remained in her country, later paid the ultimate sacrifice of being guilty by association. Two stockkeepers who discovered that she was present when the three Straitsmen were killed shot her (Plomley, 1966: 194). It seems a travesty of justice, historically speaking, when the literature has focussed on the killing of the McMillan's child and his crew, while the events that led to the clansmen who perished before, received little or no mention.

On his leaving Eddystone Point, Tucker set a course for Preservation Island to seek help to avenge the killings of McMillan, Saunders and Cliff (Calder, 1972: 95–6). At Preservation Island he enlisted the services of eleven men and their Tyereelore, and they returned in two whaleboats to Eddystone Point to find that the clan had left the beach (Begg and Begg, 1979: 60). On their return trip to the islands the two whaleboats pulled alongside the *Sally* anchored in Kent Bay. One of the

passengers on the *Sally*, John Boulton, wrote of the Straitsmen's unsuccessful mission to the coast. It was in late 1824.

At night 2 sealing Boats came alongside with their crews consisting of 12 half-barbarous-looking fellows [who] informed us they had just returned from the Main where they had been to take revenge for the murder of 2 boat's crew by the natives, but had not succeeded in falling in with them (Begg and Begg, 1979: 60).

As far as the clan was concerned traditional laws had been dealt with appropriately (Plomley, 1966: 248), however, it would be three years before the clansmen would regret their decision to let Tucker escape with his life. Tucker awaited the opportunity to revenge his crewmen when the clan was least prepared, or perhaps until they were sufficiently complacent to think that the matter was closed.

3. 4. 3 A Straitsman's revenge.

About mid 1827, five seamen sailed their boat from Hobart Town and headed along the east coast (Plomley, 1966: 437; Calder, 1972: 98) towards the islands. At Sealers Cove,⁸⁶ near Eddystone Point, with darkness approaching the men anchored their boat off the beach, and sought refuge in the huts. Their presence did not go undetected and they soon found themselves under attack from clansmen, whose carefully aimed spears found their mark, inflicting serious injuries on several of the men (Plomley, 1966: 403). After pushing their boat out to sea they believed they had only just escaped with their lives (Calder, 1972: 98). These men and their boat were obviously unknown to the Coastal Plains clansmen who, on sighting the vessel's approach, approached Sealer's Cove to check out the crew. The clansmen most

⁸⁶ Now known as Greystone Point near Eddystone Point (Adam-Smith, 1965: 63).

likely considered the arrival of five young strangers to their coast as suspicious, especially when the stopover was made under the cover of darkness.

When the party arrived at Gun Carriage Island Thomas Tucker and his wife Meetoneyernanner, attended to their wounds as best they could (Adam-Smith, 1965: 62; Calder, 1972: 98-9).⁸⁷ On hearing the details of the events, and seeing the extent of wounds some of the men had suffered, Tucker realised it was time to pay the clan a visit to settle past grievances. Several weeks later, Tucker, accompanied by Meetoneyernanner, and three of the men who had healed of their wounds—Long John Riddle, Edward Sydney Mansell and Jack Williams –sailed for Eddystone Point. They made up the crew for the first sealing expedition of 1827. However, Tucker had other more sinister plans than catching seal, which he did not reveal to his new crew (Calder, 1972: 99). Had these men known that Tucker had planned in advance to kill some of the same clansmen who had recently attacked them, they probably would not have been so willing to return to Sealers Cove. Possibly Tucker reassured them that he was well known by this clan, and the crew would be safe in the presence of himself and Meetoneyernanner. Each of the men were well armed for the seal hunt, as by this stage the method of killing seal was to shoot them from the whaleboat (Calder, 1972: 99).⁸⁸ On reaching Sealers Cove, rather than the five adults occupying the cramped quarters of an open decked whaleboat, it was usual practice for the Straitsmen to use the two huts on shore when sealing, or kangaroo hunting, in the region (Calder, 1972: 99).

⁸⁷ Calder called Tucker 'resident surgeon', and that he 'fixed up their wounds... very professionally' (1972: 99).

⁸⁸ See illustration of the seals being shot from a whaleboat, 10 June 1882 on the cover page of Cumpston's 'First Visitors to Bass Strait' (1973).

At first light as the crew ate breakfast, Meetoneyernanner signalled the approach of clansmen, and Tucker used his negotiating skills to lure Jack and Murray to the fire for sweetened tea and tobacco (Calder, 1972: 100-03). To the surprise of the clansmen and his crew Tucker shot Jack at close range as he drank his tea and when Murray realised what had happened he attempted to escape the scene. Tucker seized hold of Mansell's gun and shot the fleeing warrior through the back of the head. Mansell later stated to McKay that although he was urged by Tucker to shoot the second clansman, he refused (Calder, 1972: 100-03; Mollison and Everitt, 1976, 1827; O'May, 1959b:29-30). From that morning in 1827 a line was clearly drawn in the sand at Eddystone Point that would prove to have profound ramifications on the eastern Bass Strait colonial sea frontier, and the alliance between the Straitsmen and Coastal Plains clans would be irreparably fractured. The clansmen would have had no knowledge that the strangers they had wounded and sent from their shore were on route to Gun Carriage Island. Therefore Tucker's visit was not considered with suspicion. Tucker's act of reprisal, in the killings of Jack and Murray, would be in breach of traditional laws, because as far as the clansmen were concerned the two previous attacks had been settled for both sides.

The gesture that the clansmen had bestowed to Tucker in 1824 was repaid when he allowed the young son of the clan's bungunna his freedom, and as far as Tucker was concerned the matter was settled. In regards to the reciprocity that had existed between the islands and the clans, Calder (1972: 91) later wrote that this event 'interrupted this species of barter [and] the women could then only be taken by force'.

As the story unfolded it was said that the two clansmen, Jack and Murray, had been sealing with the Straitsmen, living in the islands for a period, and could speak English well (Calder, 1972: 92-4). Although a fellow Straitsman, James Thompson, had warned the two clansmen that Tucker was going to shoot them both at the earliest opportunity (Calder, 1972: 97). Jack and Murray obviously did not believe that Tucker would carry out his threats and three years had passed since the killing of his crew. After this incident in 1827, Thompson remained true to the Coastal Plains clan alliances, and therefore was assured of their 'perfect confidence' in him (Calder 1972: 97). They maintained good relations whenever Thompson's boat came to the coast. According to Calder,

The people would help beach and launch the boat, bring water and wood to their camp whilst Thompson would reciprocate providing a crossing to off-shore reefs and islands for the mutton-bird egging season and supplement their food supply with seal carcasses (Calder, 1972: 97).

These friendly interactions between Thompson and the clanspeople offer us an insight into the degree of assistance that had once existed with all the Straitsmen before November 1827. It also demonstrates that the clansmen did not treat all Straitsmen with the same regard. It was commonly believed that the Straitsmen made 'active war on the blacks ... since which time the Straitsmen ... shot the natives whenever they met with them' (Calder, 1972: 15). This is certainly not the case with Thompson, and further, it is unreasonable to suggest that the clansmen waited on the beaches to be shot at as whaleboats sailed past, or beached to abduct women. The death toll from these attacks included three Straitsmen, a young child, and five Coastal Plains clansmen, as well as the kidnapping of several women

outside of the traditional agreements (Calder, 1972: 15). Kelly and Hobbs testified that ‘the natives grew chary of intercourse’ (Calder, 1972: 91) after the series of killings in the late 1820s.

It is extremely important to place the breakdown of relations at the colonial sea frontier in an accurate historic timeframe. Ironically it also coincides with the threat of extermination on the other side of the frontier (Calder, 1972: 9–14). As this dissertation draws to a close, the final thoughts are reserved for the Tyereelore, who from their island homes watched the disintegration of the close links they once shared with extended families and their clan countries. Whilst the clans had set the islands adrift, it was the very time they were fighting their last battles for survival and they were soon to abandon their ancient lands for a life in exile. Over a decade later, in 1842, as Stokes wrote of his admiration for the families of healthy children and a thriving population on the small-islands in eastern Bass Strait, his observations were juxtaposed with the fate that had befallen the few surviving exiles at Wybalenna on Flinders Island. Here he found the survivors of a once strong and dynamic Trouwunna people in terminal decline with no children present.

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In Conclusion to Chapter Three

The Coastal Plains people had watched from concealment as maritime activities adjacent to their seacoast brought many vessels and strangers to their shores. The clanspeople responded to the visitors from the sea in their usual cultural manner of avoidance, however, on a few occasions they were able to make social contact with

visitors who were uninvited. The first culturally significant intercourse took place when seamen beached their small whaleboats in response to smokes on the shore and gestures from the clansmen to approach. Agreements were made under clan law to exchange clanswomen for favoured European goods, and the seamen sailed back to their island homes with their wives.

From 1820 an increase in the number of men desiring to break away from the river-town seal hunting culture, joined the few remaining original residents, establishing homes on the islands in eastern Bass Strait. These men were the Straitsmen and they continued to hunt seals from their island bases. They followed the same journey to the northeast coast to acquire wives using the reciprocal exchange laws. The clanswomen became island wives to the Straitsmen, calling themselves a distinct name –Tyereelore –and their introduction into the small-island culture brought a degree of comfort to their husband's hearths. By their own initiative the Tyereelore commenced using hunting dogs to catch many hundred wallaby, skinning, processing and tanning the skins, thus contributing to the small-island skin economy.

The men grew vegetables and cereal crops, raised domestic animals and sold any surplus to the river-town markets, and traded seal, wallaby and kangaroo skins with the merchants. The couples and their children, accompanied by their dogs, visited the Coastal Plain country on seasonal kangaroo hunting expeditions to obtain skins, and to make social contact with their clan relatives. Between these seasonal visits to country regular contact was maintained between the families on islands and the mainland by signal smokes to announce that all was well. Using their traditional

skills, the Tyereelore made dresses, coats, capes, rugs and sandals from animal skins, they threaded strings of shells, gathered wild foods, and performed new songs and dances to celebrate their island lifestyle. The small-island homes contained large muttonbird rookeries and these birds became a significant part of island subsistence, with adult birds harvested from October, eggs collected in November and the young birds eaten in March and April.

The Tyereelore used traditional methods of trapping and smothering the adult muttonbirds for subsistence living, however, when the industrious Straitsmen recognised the value of feathers to the colony, their wives adapted these practices to accommodate a new economic resource. To ensure the viability of this new resource the Tyereelore needed assistance to accumulate an adequate supply of feathers before the adult birds left the islands. The Straitsmen renewed their exchange agreements with the Coastal Plain clansmen in order to acquire workers for the feather economy. Clanswomen who were exchanged to become seasonal workers in this new economic pursuit are called here Wanapakalalea women. From that time during the muttonbird season, the Straitsmen, as well as bringing dogs and favoured European goods to the clanspeople, delivered seal and adult muttonbird carcasses, and muttonbird eggs, to replace that major part of the diet otherwise provided by the Wanapakalalea.

Relations between the islands and northeast seacoast peoples remained strong from 1820 to 1824 but then the first fractures occurred. The first of four violent attacks happened when a boatload of seal hunters from the islands abducted some women from Eddystone Point and killed several clansmen. This raid was countered the same year later when a second raid from the islands was attempted and the party

of three crewmen were ambushed and killed. Their deaths were followed in about 1826/27 by an attack on five men sheltering at Eddystone Point that left several crewmen wounded. A fourth attack that took place about 1827, led by a man from the straits who had survived the second incident in 1824, resulted in two of the clansmen being killed. This was the final act when the Straitsmen involved broke clan laws that governed retaliative actions, and demarcates the time when the peoples from both sides of the straits severed their close alliances.

The Tyereelore, and their Straitsmen husbands, remained on their small-island homes, and from these unions the next generation grew and thrived. Although set adrift from their country and families, the Tyereelore continued many cultural practices, blending traditional skills and knowledge in order to develop the new mixed economy and distinct lifestyle that would ensure their survival. Between 1828 and 1830 the Coastal Plain clans were facing an enemy on their land frontier that would reduce their numbers to a remaining few men. Bungunna Mannalargenna was involved in the negotiations that would see to their safety, but their liberty was replaced by exile. As the island cultures blended and thrived the country of the Coastal Plain clan's became silent.

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Conclusion

A great deal has been written about Aboriginal/European contact relations on the colonial sea frontier of eastern Bass Strait, as well as the events and relationships that shaped this history. Historians and other commentators have appraised the journals of George Augustus Robinson and other primary sources without listening to the voices of the people who played significant roles throughout this period.

Neither the central or marginal orthodox accounts, as outlined in the introduction, are fully accurate. The truth is somewhere in between. There have been few attempts to revise these orthodox accounts, and the gaps in the literature have not been addressed. This thesis is written to reassess traditional views, and to fill the silent space amidst and between the two accounts with the voices of the historical participants themselves—the Straitsmen, the Tyereelore and the Coastal Plain people.

At the colonial sea frontier there were several stages and modes of contact. At the early stage of contact with strangers the Coastal Plain people initially practiced cultural avoidance, feigning a lack of interest in the visitors, all the while being acutely aware of the activities along their land and sea borders. But as early as 1812, it was the clansmen who beckoned the whaleboats to the shore using smokes as a signal to promise a safe approach. There were other groups of men who came to the coast uninvited, intruding onto clan lands to carry out aggravated attacks, abducting women, and killing clanspeople indiscriminately. The Coastal Plains clansmen

quickly learnt how to distinguish between boats and crews as to ascertain whether they were extended family or enemies.

The men who have been called 'the sealers' were not an homogenous group. At least four different cohorts have been identified as using the Bass Strait seaway. The first cohort comprised of large gangs of voyage-sealers who worked out of Port Jackson on a seasonal basis between 1798 and 1810. The second cohort consisted of small crews of river-town seal hunters based in Hobart Town and Launceston, who were indentured to local merchants and then cleared by the colonial authorities to go to the straits on short seasonal trips. Thirdly, there were several types of desperate men—escapees, thieves and pirates—some of whom were seeking a passage out of colonial waters, while others were bushrangers of the sea who hid among the islands, raiding the colony and stealing goods to perpetuate an illicit economy. Lastly, the fourth cohort were Straitsmen, who found their independence by becoming permanent residents on small islands in eastern Bass Strait.

These Straitsmen were able to break away from familiar colonial culture and laws, and the conveniences of town life, to live on the remote islands of Bass Strait. While these men were legally operating in island waters, it seems that they had not gained permission to live on the islands according to colonial law, and it was this tenuous status of residency, rather than their character, that put them at odds with the authorities. They were a distinct breed of men who chose a life of independence and freedom—hard headed pragmatists, who yet had idealistic desires to be free of the constraints of colonial society. In realising this desire they created a highly distinctive lifestyle.

Perhaps the most remarkable feature of the life of the Straitsmen was that they developed close relations with the Coastal Plain clans, becoming incorporated into the mutual exchange system that was imbedded in traditional laws. The Straitsmen chose to do this for practical reasons, not wanting to live as servants in the colony. In traditional society reciprocal arrangements were made between men of high status, and it was the clan bungunnas who carried out negotiations with the Straitsmen. What evidence we do have suggests that the Straitsmen took their arrangements seriously with the bungunnas, and in this way they became engaged in the politics of Coastal Plains society.

Social gatherings between the Straitsmen and the Coastal Plains clans added a vibrancy to the Straitsmen's lives that was missing from their frugal and gloomy small-island existence. Reciprocity was at the heart of these relationships. The Straitsmen desired the women, and the Coastal Plain people desired European provisions and dogs. Relations between the two groups were developed out of traditional practices, and the Straitsmen became family members, accepting responsibilities under clan laws. When the business was completed, the extended family group—the Straitsmen and the clanspeople—celebrated their coming together through song, dance and feasting.

Just as the men were not of one kind, the women too did not make up a homogenous group. There were two cohorts of clanswomen associated with the Bass Strait islands, the Tyereelore—the wives—and the Wanapakalalea—the seasonal workers. The Tyereelore lived as permanent small-island residents, whilst the Wanapakalalea stayed in the islands for summer and autumn months and returned to

their country during winter and spring. With the introduction and development of the muttonbird feather industry, reciprocal exchange expanded to include the labour of the Wanapakalalea women on a seasonal basis. This exchange was reciprocated by a regular delivery of foods that the Wanapakalalea would have traditionally provided, during the spring and summer months. In this way the Straitsmen compensated the clanspeople for the displacement of women from the traditional economy, whilst the clans supported the new small-island economy.

The Straitsmen were entrepreneurs, and their economic self-interest encouraged them to maintain good relations with their wives, but not by operating under a hierarchical structure of management. The sharing of economic activities allowed the Tyereelore freedom to continue their cultural traditions, giving them the independence to adapt their traditional ways to the new economy.

Many of the clanswomen, associated with the islands of eastern Bass Strait, were comfortable with their new surroundings and had volunteered to go to the islands. However, there were a few who were not willing to leave their country, and probably were forced to go. At least eight of these women, while attempting to return from the islands to their clan country, perished at sea. Others were punished severely for stealing from the small-island stores, for being lazy and for telling lies. Although on one tragic occasion a Tyereelore was shot for not doing her job to the satisfaction of her husband, the record certainly suggests that this was an exception rather than the rule.

The Tyereelore did not consider themselves slaves, identifying themselves with a new title that summed up their new role and status as island wives. It was a

name derived from their own language and geographic location, and importantly, their husbands had a part in choosing this identity. The Tyereelore continued their customary roles as resource managers, and exhibited great flexibility in adapting these traditions to a new economy of scale demanded by the imperatives of productions on the islands. Working alongside their husbands, they demonstrated that they were far more useful to remote island life than European women would have been, using traditional methods and expanding and diversifying the small island mono-cultural economy to a bi-cultural mixed economy.

The Tyereelore were equal partners with the Straitsmen in the development of a new way of life, which comprised a blend of clan and European traditions. Some clan traditions they were not prepared to abandon. While their wives managed the island's resources, the Straitsmen were the teachers of their children in reading, writing and religious instruction, providing them with an aptitude to survive in colonial towns. The older boys were taught the skills of working the boats, understanding the elements, and the necessary instructions to safely navigate the islands.

The Straitsmen and the Tyereelore returned from their small-island homes to the Coastal Plains lands for short seasonal periods during autumn and winter, to bond with families. During these times the Straitsmen and clansmen joined together to hunt kangaroo for skins that would be traded in the river-town markets, while the women collected swan eggs, with kangaroo meat and eggs providing food for the larger extended family gatherings. In between visits back to country, regular smoke

contact was made between the Coastal Plains and small-island families in a way that followed traditional practice.

Close family alliances between the Bass Strait island community and the Coastal Plains clans continued for about fifteen years, from about 1812 until 1827. However, between 1824 and 1827 four violent attacks did occur. These left at least five clansmen dead and three clanswomen abducted, and three Straitsmen and a child dead, plus two seamen seriously injured. Three of these attacks were settled in a traditional way, however, the final unwarranted and unsanctioned act of revenge fell outside of clan laws, and the clans turned their backs on the islands. By the end of 1827, relations between the two cultures had irreparably fractured with all but one crew of Straitsmen. All other family ties were severed and the Tyereelore drifted apart from their Trouwunna relatives.

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The development of this thesis has been a long and often painful process. It has been necessary to study the expansive extant body of literature concerning the colonial sea frontier contact relations. Many of the conclusions reached is a result of reading between the lines of these primary and secondary materials. The orthodox historic account has tended to replicate and perpetuate the same story without revision, taking for granted what has been previously published as an accurate version of activities and descriptions of the characters of this period. It has been necessary to balance the orthodox views with Aboriginal stories, between which there has frequently been tension. The process followed has isolated fact from legend through employing a culturally sensitive eye and mind.

To date, historical writing on this topic has been influenced by George Augustus Robinson's biased view of the world, his journals being painted with prejudices, in particular, his estimations of the character of the Straitsmen. Archaeological investigations conducted in the northeast region have provided an invaluable contribution towards informing the research on the Coastal Plain clan's mode of living, and their territories and borders. These archaeological surveys have identified important cultural traces in the landscape and revealed patterns of movement that remained obscured in the ethnographic record.

This research has shown that the Coastal Plains families lived for the majority of time within the coastal margins and along the river systems. They travelled away from these waterways into the hinterland foothills, in small groups, over short periods of time, for specific purposes. The Coastal Plains clans used a single road that was the vital link for travel between clan territories, and to visit neighbouring lands. They did not change their traditional practices to accommodate the Straitsmen, quite the opposite; it was the Straitsmen who timed their visits to the northeast coast to fit in with the clanspeople's traditional seasonal rhythms.

Between 1827 and 1830, it was not the displacement of clanswomen to the islands, or attacks by the Straitsmen, that tipped the delicate balance that the bungunnas had endeavoured to maintain. The catalyst for the rapid demise of the Coastal Plains people was the ramification of martial law enacted by the colonial government, which spearheaded military action, and escalated attacks by roving parties on the land frontier.

This work has laid the foundation on which should be built a more detailed analysis of the communities of the Straitsmen and the Tyereelore that emerged on the small islands. It has introduced new terms to identify some of the main players and places. Future work should explore the liminal spaces that enabled the Bass Strait island peoples to develop highly distinctive characteristics. Perhaps as significant is the experience of the writer who has lived in country, walked the lands, seen the rhythms of the seasons, and listened to the silence.

Much that has been related, and is still written, about the episodes of colonial history is sensational and repetitive. This research has endeavoured to look much more closely at the record to reveal a more complex and interesting past, and thereby making an invaluable contribution to understanding frontier relations in the wider Australian context. The people of this thesis were not just victims who had no input into the development of colonial society. Their story is remarkably similar to that of the characters in the work by James Boyce⁸⁹ who has changed our understanding of the life of the emancipists and the convicts on the new frontiers. They too adapted and became attached to their new environment, and formed close contacts with their neighbouring clanspeople. In this way the Straitsmen exemplify the characterisations by Boyce of the first generation of Tasmanians. The Straitsmen and the Tyereelore learnt to survive in a new isolated environment, and have provided a highly distinctive and complex legacy to the Aboriginal people of Tasmania. Their story is truly a unique blending of grease and ochre—from the water and earth.

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⁸⁹ Boyce, J, 2008, 'Van Diemen's Land', Black Inc., Books, Melbourne.

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21 October, 1804.

28 October, 1804.

4 November, 1804.

11 November, 1804.

16 December, 1804.

23 December, 1804.

24 December, 1804.

6 January, 1805.

21 February, 1805.

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Appendix 1

Table 1: 1810 - 1820 Eastern Straitsmen, Furneaux Group, Eastern Bass Strait.

Year Arrived	Sealer	Age 1831	Location 1831	Location 1837	Location 1847	Alias and Other Information
c. 1812	George Briggs	32	Clarke Island	Clarke Island	Living in Launceston	
c. 1814	Archibald Campbell		Dead			Jemmy
c. 1818	John Smith	45	Gun Carriage Island 1820	Gun Carriage Island, Clarke Island	Gun Carriage Island	Claims to be the first person to settle on Gun Carriage Island
c. 1820	John Harrington		Drowned Dec 1824 ^B			
c. 1820	John Mira Myra, Myree	35	Gun Carriage Island		Gun Carriage Island, Woody Island	

Source: Plomley, N.J.B., 1966 *Friendly Mission*, Tasmanian Historical Research Association, Hobart, and Plomley, N.J.B. & Henley, K.A., 1990, *The Sealers of Bass Strait and the Cape Barren Island Community*, Blubber Head Press, Hobart.

Appendix 1

Table 2: 1820 – 1830 Eastern Straitsmen, Furneaux Group. Eastern Bass Strait

Year Arrived	Sealer	Age 1831	Location 1831	Location 1837	Location 1847	Alias
	George Robinson	63	Woody Island	Unknown	Probably dead	
c. 1820	James Everett	29	Woody Island	Woody Island	Woody Island	Jem
c. 1820	James Munro	51	Preservation Island	Preservation Island	Preservation Island	
c. 1822	Duncan McMillan		Killed by clansmen in 1824			
c. 1822	John Johnson	29	Gun Carriage Island	Drowned 1837		
c. 1823	Thomas Tucker	40	Gun Carriage Island	Gun Carriage Island	Gun Carriage Island	Strait's Lawyer (Plomley 1966: 334)
c. 1823	Thomas Bailey Bayley	52	Gun Carriage Island	Swan Island		
c. 1823	Charles Peterson (invalid)	45	Gun Carriage Island	Dead		Little Charlie
c. 1824	Thomas Beedon Beadon Beeton	33	Gun Carriage Island	Launceston	Badger Island	Born 1798 Died 1867
c. 1824	Richard Maynard	40	Gun Carriage Island	Clarke Island	Check	
c. 1824	William Slack	31	Gun Carriage Island	Clarke Island	Dead 1844	
c. 1824/1826/29	John Brown	40-41	Drowned Clarke Island Reef			
c. 1825	John Anderson	40-50	Woody Island	Woody Island		Abyssinia Jack

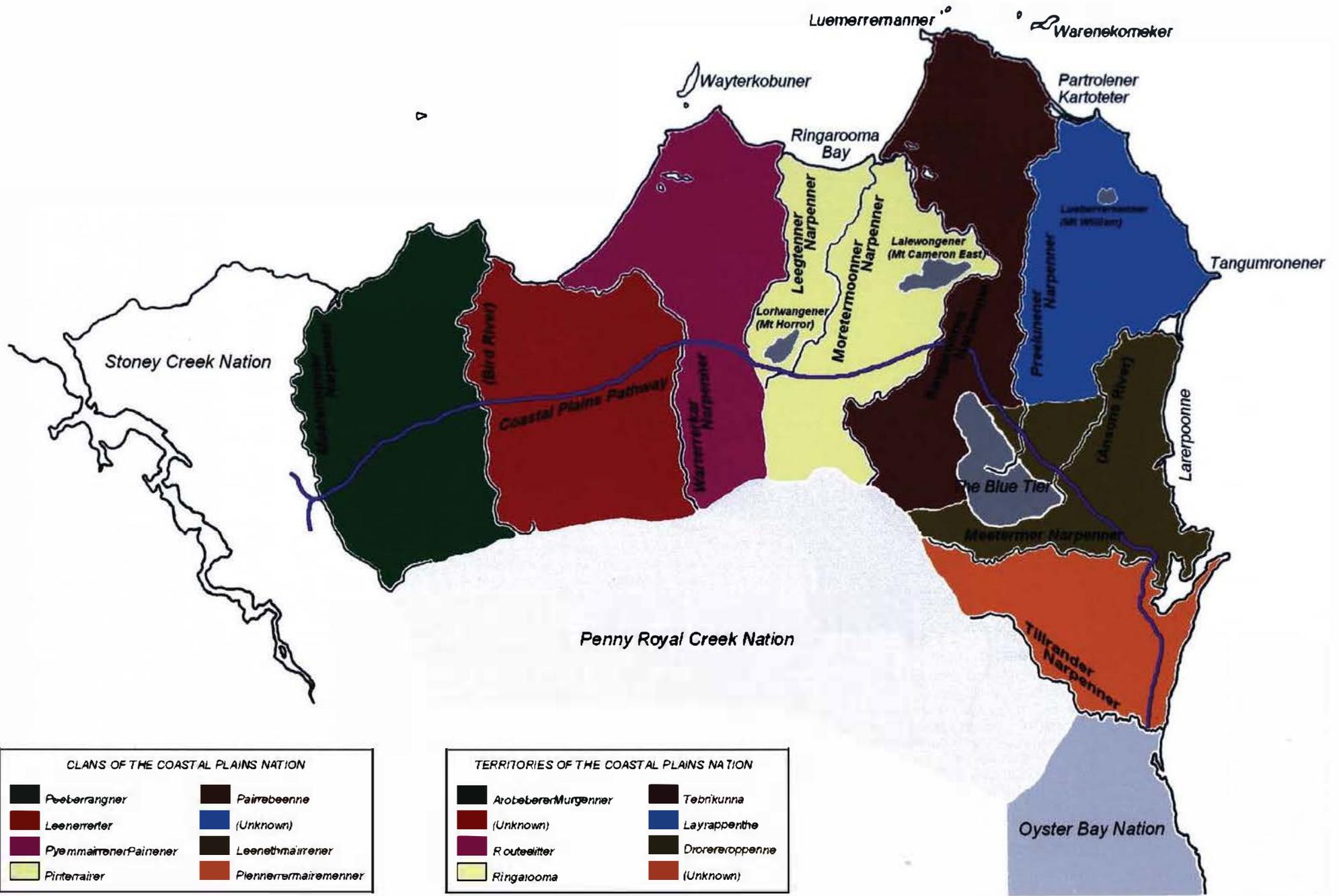
Source: Plomley, N.J.B., 1966 *Friendly Mission*, Tasmanian Historical Research Association, Hobart, and Plomley, N.J.B. & Henley, K.A., 1990, *The Sealers of Bass Strait and the Cape Barren Island Community*, Blubber Head Press, Hobart.

Appendix 1.

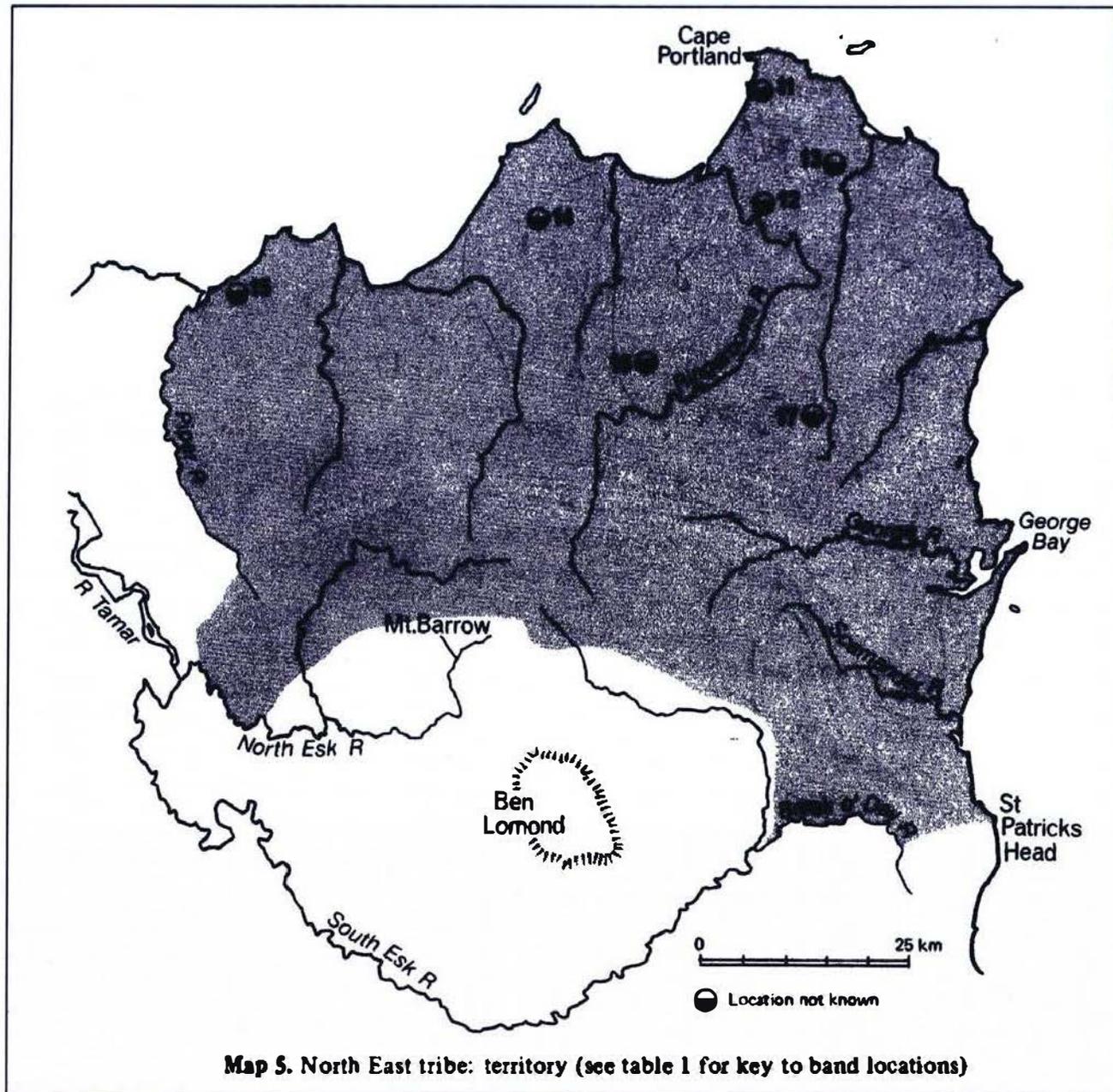
Table 3: 1820 – 1830 Eastern Straitsmen, Furneaux Group, Eastern Bass Strait.

Year Arrived	Sealer	Age 1831	Location 1831	Location 1837	Location 1847	Alias
c. 1826	John Riddle	47-50	Gun Carriage Island	Gun Carriage Island	Gun Carriage Island	Long Jack
c. 1826	Edward Mansell	35-40	Gun Carriage Island	Preservation Island	Gun Carriage Island	Tom Sydney Sydney Mansell
c. 1827	William Proctor	35	Gun Carriage Island	Unknown		Woolly
c. 1828	David Kelly	35	Preservation Island	Preservation Island	Preservation Island	
c. 1828	Robert Rew/Rhe w Drew	37	Hunter Island- moved to eastern straits about 1832	Woody Island Tin Kettle Island	Woody Island Tin Kettle Island	
c. 1829	John Thomas	57	Preservation Island	Preservation Island	Preservation Island	Long Tom
c. 1833	John Strugnel Stragnel Stragnal	34		Gun Carriage Island		
c. 1823	James Thompson	32	Gun Carriage Island	Dead by 1835		
Born 1813	Edward Tomlin	18				Ned Son of Jumbo's mother
c. 1829 see FM 305	Jack Williams		Drowned 1830 Clarke Island Reef			Black Jack

Source: Plomley, N.J.B., 1966 *Friendly Misston*, Tasmanian Historical Research Association, Hobart; Plomley, N.J.B. & Henley, K.A., 1990, *The Sealers of Bass Strait and the Cape Barren Island Community*, Blubber Head Press, Hobart.



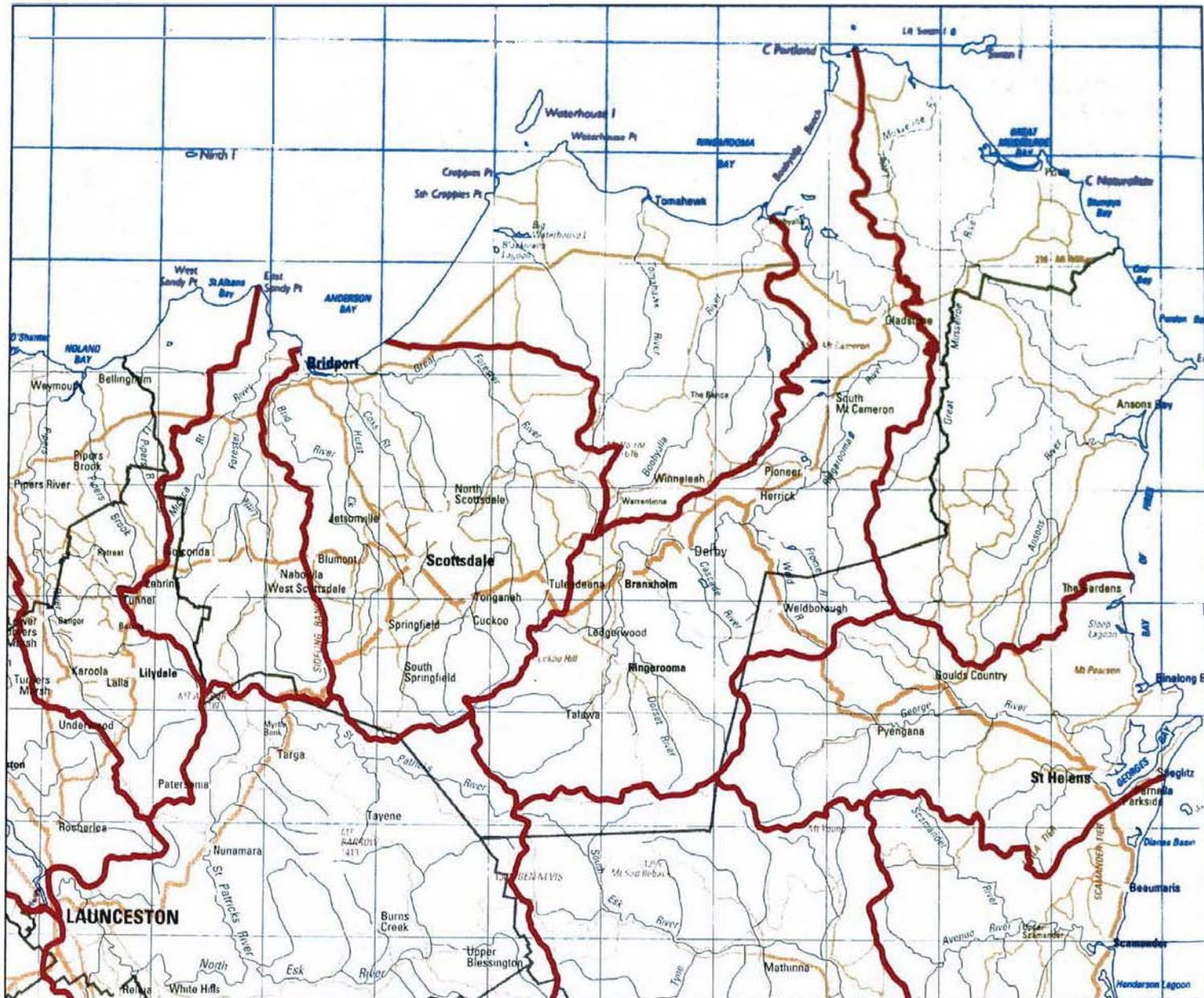
Appendix2 Map 1: Coastal Plains Clan Territories and River Boundaries
 Source: Cameron, P. 2008



Appendix 2 Map 2

North East Tribe Territory

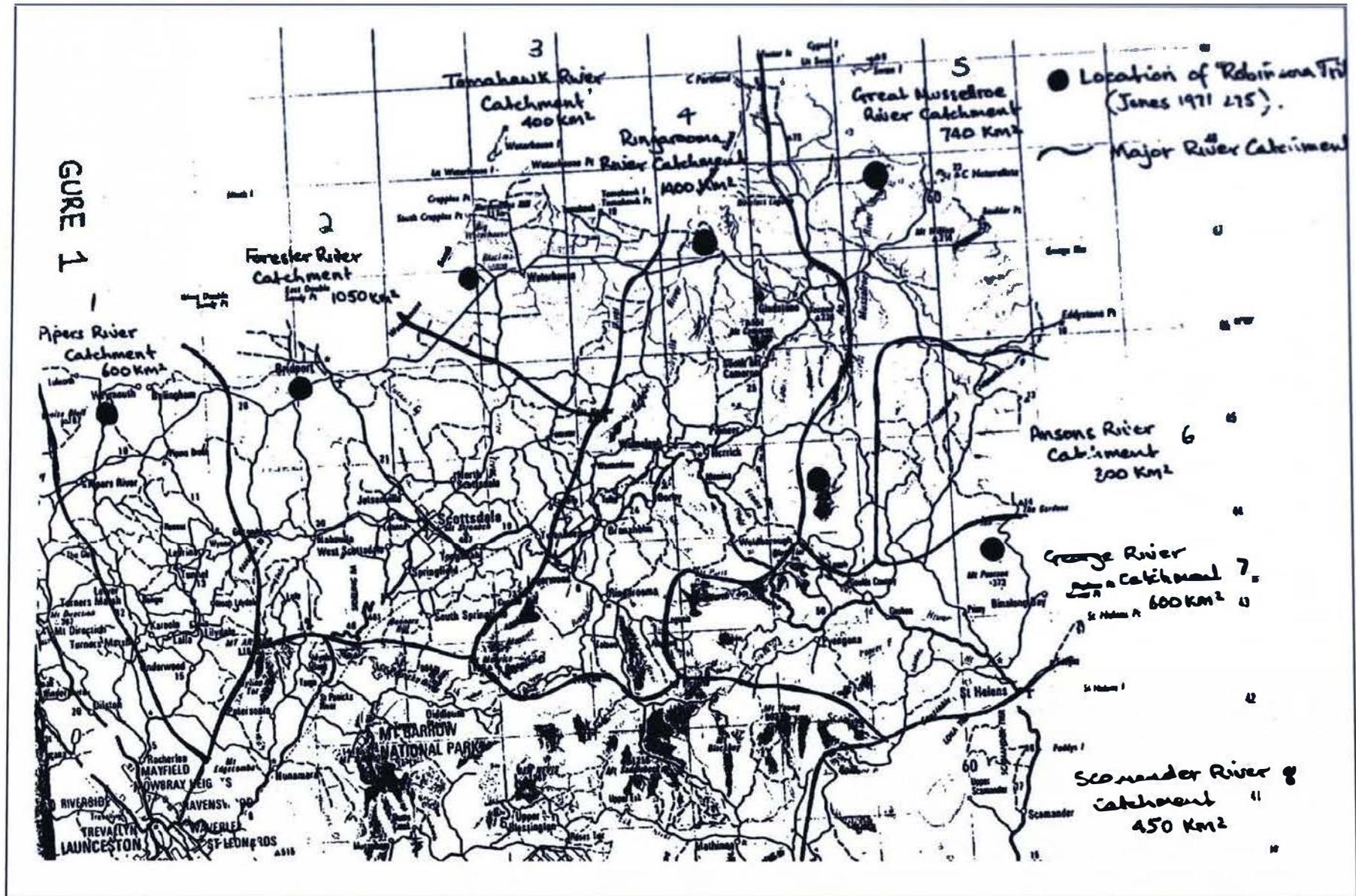
Source: Ryan, L. 1996, *The Aboriginal Tasmanians*, Allen & Urwin, Sydney, Page 22.



Appendix 2 Map 3:

North East Water Catchments

Source: Tasmanian Catchments Land and Water Mangement, 2000, Department of Primary Industries, Water & Environment.



Appendix 2 Map 4

North East River Catchments and Clan Locations

Source: Cosgrove, R & Scotney, P., in Kee, S. 1987, *North East Tasmanian Archaeological Survey: A Regional Study*, Department of Lands, Parks and Wildlife and The Australian Heritage Commission, Appendix I, Figure. 1.



Appendix 2 Map 5: The Furneaux Group in Eastern Bass Strait: Clarke Island, Vansittart Island (Gun Carriage Island), Anderson Island (Woody Island), Preservation Island.
 Source: Tasmanian Catchments Land and Water Management, Department of Primary Industries Water & Environment, 2000