

ABSTRACT

Research Grant: G2008/7403

Grantee: University of Tasmania, Dr Linn Miller, School of Philosophy, University of Tasmania (project management) Patsy Cameron, Aboriginal historian, geographer and Elder (research management).

Title: Mannalargenna's Country: In Grandfather's Footsteps; Through Grandfather's Eyes

Mannalargenna's Country: In Grandfather's Footsteps; Through Grandfather's Eyes is a Tasmanian Aboriginal history project funded by the Australian Institute of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Studies (AIATSIS) and conducted between 2008 - 2009. *Mannalargenna's Country* is Stage 2 of the broader *Telling Places in Country* project, a community engaged Aboriginal research initiative focussed on History, Place and Identity and follows in the wake of the project pilot *Meeting at Bark Hut (2007-2008)* (Final Report and Results also deposited with AIATSIS).

Background

In 1830 the colonial government of Tasmania launched its 'Friendly Mission' campaign, led by George Augustus Robinson and designed to circumambulate the island rounding up Tasmanian Aboriginal clanspeople in preparation for their removal from the Tasmanian mainland. By 1835 most of the Aboriginal population of mainland Tasmania had been re-settled Wybalenna, the Aboriginal Establishment, built for the purpose on Flinders Island. By 1847 only forty-seven of the 300 Robinson had originally captured remained alive. The events that lead up to, and surround, the Aboriginal journey into exile had profound and lasting effects on Tasmania's Aboriginal peoples, and they are naturally concerned with how stories of those events, their country and their ancestors are told.

The first leg of Robinson's campaign was 'Expedition to the Sealers' 1830-1831. On this expedition Robinson's party meandered through the northeast region of Tasmania, encountered and collected the first clanspeople marked for removal. The northeast region is the traditional homelands of the progenitors of a significant number of present-day Aboriginal Tasmanians. Among the first local clanspeople to be encountered and taken into exile by Robinson was Mannalargenna. Mannalargenna is an important figure, as one of a few bungunnas (leaders) who, in 1830, still remained in their country and from whose daughters the vast majority of present-day Tasmanian Aborigines are descendants. As such they have a special interest in Robinson's activities during this leg of the 'Friendly Mission', the clan country he journeyed through and the clanspeople he engaged with.

Methodology

Using N.J.B. Plomley (ed), *Friendly Mission, the Tasmanian journals and papers of George Augustus Robinson* (1966) as its primary source *Telling Places in Country* retraced, remapped and reinterpreted 'Friendly Mission' journeylines through northeast Tasmania in which clanleader Mannalargenna played a major role. Along the way, Aboriginal narratives of colonial contact relations and an Aboriginal lifeworld—history, landscape and culture—

recorded in Robinson's journals, but hitherto obscured or neglected, are retrieved, and the conventional story of the 'Friendly Mission' is radically retold.

Research involved forensic textual analysis as well as a significant action research component. Fieldwork formed a significant component of the project. Along with extensive reconnaissance, three major fieldwork expeditions were conducted during the *Mannalargenna's Country: In Grandfather's Footsteps; Through Grandfather's Eyes* project phase. These followed selected journeylines from Robinson's 1830-31 forays and took place as far as possible on dates coinciding with their historical counterparts. Participants numbered up to 30 and included researchers and visiting academics, Aboriginal knowledge custodians (Elders, students, land management trainees and community members), various support crews (media, camping and surveying) as well as local landowners and managers and agency representatives. During this process, routes taken by Robinson's party were resurveyed. Inconsistencies and errors appearing in routes plotted by Plomley, and appearing in *Friendly Mission* (1966; 2008) were identified and more accurate maps generated.

Results

Along with generating a more accurate record of movements, the project team were able to construct a much richer and more coherent narrative of events, a richer understanding of places and placescapes (including their Aboriginal nomenclature), a fuller and more comprehensive set of biographies of the Aboriginal clanspeople involved in the 'Friendly Mission' campaign and a deeper understanding of their lifeways and cultural practice. While these elements are of vital importance to Tasmanian Aboriginal communities, as well as in the shared histories of Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal Tasmanians, they had not been the focus of academic research. Nor had this information been available to Tasmanian Aborigines or the broader community in an accessible form. Project results constitute an important addition to knowledge concerning colonial contact relations as well as Aboriginal history and heritage, a significant cultural resource for Tasmanian Aboriginal communities, as well as a complimentary tool for teaching Tasmanian Aboriginal history.

A comprehensive record of project outcomes of *In Mannalargenna's Country: Re-tracing, re-mapping and re-interpreting George Augustus Robinson's expedition to remove the northeast clanspeople of Tasmania. (G2008/7403)* and its pilot project *Meeting at Bark Hut* have been integrated and amalgamated under the title *Telling Places in Country: Re-tracing and re-telling the story of the 'Friendly Mission' through northeast Aboriginal clancountry, Tasmania 1830 -1831* and are recorded in an interactive multimedia presentation on CD.

A *Telling Places in Country* website is currently under construction and will come online in the near future. The University of Tasmania will provide the host site. A printed booklet entitled *Mannalargenna's Country: In Grandfather's Footsteps; Through Grandfather's Eyes* documenting key research outcomes of *In Mannalargenna's Country* has also been compiled and has been deposited with the CD.