

Truganini

Tasmanian aborigine – one of the last of her tribe



Truganini (1812? - 1876), by unknown photographer, courtesy of National Library of Australia

The fate of the native Tasmanians.

The indigenous people of Tasmania were relatively short in stature with very little body fat. They were marked by tightly curled hair and skin colour ranging from black to reddish-brown. They crossed the land bridge from mainland Australia to the island we call Tasmania before this strip of land was submerged and in consequence had been isolated from the rest of the world for some 10,000 years before the white man arrived. Hunter-gatherers, they had an exceptionally basic technology, making only a few types of simple stone and wooden tools. As with mainland aborigines, they kept no written records. We do not know what they called themselves or what they named their land.

All we really have are minute fragments, bits of evidence, and the records and documents of Europeans who came to the island.

The isolation of Tasmania's aborigines ended in 1642 with the arrival of the first Europeans. Abel Jansen Tasman, the Dutch navigator after whom the island is named, anchored off the Tasmanian coast in early December, 1642. He named the island Van Diemen's land after Anthony Van Diemen--the governor-general of the Dutch East India Company at the time. The island continued to be called Van Diemen's Land until 1855.

On March 5, 1772, a French expedition led by Nicholas Marion du Fresne landed on the island. Within a few hours his sailors had shot several Aborigines. On January 28, 1777, the British arrived. Following the pattern set in coastal New South Wales Tasmania was established as a British convict settlement. Eventually more than 65,000 men and women convicts were settled in Van Diemens Land, together with soldiers, administrators, and missionaries. A glaringly inefficient penal system allowed convicts to escape into the hinterland. According to social historian Clive Turnbull, these escapees brutally slaughtered the local aborigines. The colonial government itself, Turnbull claims, was not inclined to consider the indigenous people as full human beings. Not a single European was ever punished for the murder of Tasmanian Aborigines.

The name of the official campaign directed against the aboriginal people of Tasmania was "The Black War of Van Diemen's Land" Between 1803 and 1830 the aboriginal population was reduced from five thousand to fewer than an estimated seventy five. An article published on December 1, 1826 in the Tasmanian *Colonial Times* declared that:

"We make no pompous display of Philanthropy. The Government must remove the natives--if not, they will be hunted down like wild beasts and destroyed!"

H. G. Wells, in Chapter One of his novel *The War of the Worlds*, (published i1898), wrote: "We must remember what ruthless and utter destruction our own species has wrought, not only upon animals such as the vanished bison and dodo, but also upon its own inferior races. The Tasmanians, in spite of their human likeness, were entirely

swept out of existence in a war of extermination waged by European immigrants in the space of fifty years."

In 1876 the last Tasmanian aborigine died. She is best known as Truganini, however there are a number of different versions of her name, including Trugernanner, Trucanini and Trucaninny. .

"Queen" Truganini

Truganini, sometimes called Queen Truganini, was born *circa* 1812 on Bruny Island, south of today's Hobart, and separated from the Tasmanian mainland by the D'Entrecasteaux Channel. She was a daughter of Mangana, Chief of the Bruny Island people. Her name was the word her tribe used to describe the grey saltbush *Atriplex cinerea*. Before she was eighteen, her mother had been killed by whalers, her first fiance died while saving her from abduction, and in 1828, her two sisters, Lowhenunhue and Maggerleede, were abducted and taken to Kangaroo Island, off South Australia, and sold as slaves. She married Woorady, although he died when she was still in her twenties.



Truganini's family

When Lieutenant-Governor George Arthur arrived in Van Diemen's Land in 1824, he implemented two policies to deal with the growing conflict between settlers and the Aborigines. First, bounties were awarded for the capture of Aboriginal adults and children, and secondly Arthur tried to establish friendly relations to lure the aborigines into camps. He started his campaign on Bruny Island where there had been fewer hostilities than in other parts of Tasmania.



**Stylised representation of George Augustus Robinson with Tasmanian Aborigines
"The Conciliation" - painting by Benjamin Duterrau, 1840**

In 1830, George Augustus Robinson, the Protector of Aborigines, moved Truganini and Woorrady to Flinders Island with about one hundred others, the last surviving Tasmanian Aborigines. The stated aim of isolation was to save them but many of the group died from influenza and other diseases. Truganini became a guide and interpreter for Robinson, helping him with a settlement for mainland aborigines at Port Phillip in 1838. After about two years of living in and around Melbourne they became outlaws, stealing from settlers around Dandenong before heading to Bass River and then Cape Paterson where members of their outlaw group murdered two whalers, then shot and injured other settlers around the area. A long pursuit followed and those responsible for the murders were captured, sent for trial hanged in Melbourne. A gunshot wound to Truganini's head was treated by Doctor Hugh Anderson of Bass River and she and her party were sent to Melbourne for trial. Truganini was sent back to

Flinders Island. In 1856, the few surviving Tasmanian Aborigines on Flinders Island, including Truganini were moved to a settlement at Oyster Cove, south of Hobart.



The last four Tasmanian aboriginal – Truganini on the right of the group

By 1873, Truganini was the sole survivor of the Oyster Cove group, and was again moved to Hobart. By 1869 she and William Lanney were the only full bloods alive. The mutilation of Lanney's body after his death in March led Truganini to tell the Rev. H. D. Atkinson, "I know that when I die the Museum wants my body" She was correct.



**The Female Factory at Cascades today. The beam over the entrance now reads
"Through this gate passed thousands of women and children.
Lest we forget."**

Truganini died three years later, having requested that her ashes be scattered in the D'Entrecasteaux Channel. She was, however, buried at the former Female Factory at Cascades, a suburb of Hobart. Within two years, her skeleton was exhumed by the Royal Society of Tasmania and later placed on display. Only in April 1976, approaching the centenary of her death, were her remains finally cremated and scattered according to her wishes.

In 1997 the Royal Albert Memorial Museum, Exeter, returned Truganini's necklace and bracelet to Tasmania. Hair and skin were found in the collection of the Royal College of Surgeons of England in 2002, and returned to Tasmania for burial.



Memorial to Truganini on Bruny Island

References

adbonline.anu.edu.au/biogs/A060326b.htm

www.aboriginalartonline.com/regions/tasmania.php