

## Questionnaire: Tasmania

### 1. Description

#### 1.1 Name(s) of society, language, and language family:

Tasmania, Tasmanian, Tasmanian is its own language family that isn't related to any other language in the world and is now extinct. (1)

#### 1.2 ISO code (3 letter code from ethnologue.com):

AU-TAS

#### 1.3 Location (latitude/longitude):

The latitude and longitude for the capital city of Hobart are 42° 52'S 147° 19'E (2). The Tasmanian language was spoken across the island by the Aboriginal people until approximately 1877 when the Aboriginal people went extinct. (1)

#### 1.4 Brief history:

Humans arrived to Tasmania somewhere between 25,000-40,000 years ago via a land bridge that connected to the Australian mainland. The land bridge disappeared some 11,000 years ago isolating the people on the island. The indigenous people were believed to be a nomadic hunter-gather society. The island of Tasmania was discovered in 1642 by a Dutch explorer named Abel Janszoon Tasman. The British later colonized Tasmania around 1800 as a way to establish naval power in the region and used the island primarily as a penal colony. The British colony expanded but at a cost to the indigenous population. Due to both disease and the Black War, which was a conflict between the indigenous and colonial populations, almost all the native Tasmanians were wiped out. Tasmania would continue grow and prosper economically and in 1901 it gained independence with the rest of the Australian colonies and made the Commonwealth of Australia. Since 1901 Tasmania has continued to grow and operate as part of the Commonwealth of Australia.(1) (3)

#### 1.5 Influence of missionaries/schools/governments/powerful neighbors:

The British colonized the island and this would have a direct impact on the native population. Due to both disease and the Black War nearly all of the indigenous population would be wiped out and lead to a predominantly European island. (1) (3)

#### 1.6 Ecology (natural environment):

"Tasmania is essentially a mountainous island. In the west, where the highest peak on the island, Mount Ossa, reaches 5,305 feet (1,617 meters), the landscape comprises several parallel northwest-southeast ridges and valleys. Eastward lies a series of plateaus at various elevations; the highest point is Ben Lomond in the northeast, which rises to 5,161 feet (1,573 meters) at Legges Tor. But the dominant feature of Tasmanian geography is the glaciated, lake-studded Central Plateau, bounded on the north and east by a 2,000-foot (610-metre) fault scarp and sloping gently southeastward from 3,500 to 2,000 feet (1,070 to 610 meters). Much of the east is made up of a low, dissected plateau averaging about 1,200 feet (370 meters). Extensive plains are confined to the far northwest, the lower South Esk River valley, and the northeast. The Bass Strait islands represent outliers of the northern coastal platforms. Fossil-laden cliffs on the northern shore of Tasmania and on Maria Island off the eastern coast indicate areas that once lay beneath the sea. Conversely, postglacial submergence in the southeast has produced one of the

finest examples of a drowned coastline. Tasmania, located in the midlatitude westerly wind belt and dominated by southern maritime air masses, generally enjoys a moist, equable climate, with mild to warm summers, mild winters in most settled areas, and rain during all seasons. However, the southwest has much rugged weather, and the southeast can suffer drought. Collision between tropical air masses—in summer from the continent and in spring and autumn from the eastern Tasmanian coast—and the mountainous surface results in greater climatic variety than in other parts of Australia. Annual precipitation, seasonal moisture deficiencies, and temperatures range widely and irregularly across the state. Average annual precipitation exceeds 100 inches (2,500 mm) on the western ranges and declines eastward to less than 20 inches (510 mm) in some places; along the north coast it exceeds 30 inches (760 mm) in all locations. The seasonal incidence in the north and west is greatest in winter, and in the south and east it is greatest in spring. Summer rainfall may vary markedly from year to year, especially in the drier east. Mean January temperatures are higher in the north and east than elsewhere, reaching 64 °F (18 °C) at Launceston; mean July temperatures are 46 to 49 °F (8 to 9 °C) in all coastal stations, declining sharply with elevation.” (1)

“The Tasmanian flora is a mixture of Southern Oceanic and Australian components. The high mountains and high rainfall of the western of the western region produce floristic affinities with New Zealand and South America, while the lower and drier eastern region is predominantly Australian in character.” (4) “Tasmania has a range of fauna closely related to that of the Australian mainland: mammals like the platypus and echidna, a variety of marsupials including several species of kangaroo, as well as the thylacine and Tasmanian devil. It also has several genera of rodents and some bats.” (4)

#### 1.7 Population size, mean village size, home range size, density

The current population in Tasmania is 507,626 with a density of 7.36/km<sup>2</sup> (June 2010) (5) The original Aborigines people were estimated to have a population of 3,000-4,000. The people usually lived in bands, which contained 40-50 people, and estimates are there were at the highest point 70-85 bands of which 48 have been identified. This puts the indigenous population density around one person per 13-23 km<sup>2</sup>. (4)

## 2. Economy

### 2.1 Main carbohydrate staple(s):

“They were mainly carnivorous, eating little in the way of vegetables. Of course, they must have also eaten indigenous fruits, but they made no attempt to cultivate patches of ground for agricultural purposes.” (3)

### 2.2 Main protein-lipid sources:

Kangaroos, wallabies, wombats, potoroos, fish. (4)

### 2.3 Weapons: Bow and arrow, blowguns?:

Throwing sticks and clubs, no bow and arrows, spears, and waddy “a wooden rod about 60cm long and 2 to 3 cm in diameter, one end bluntly pointed and the other roughened for holding- either to strike a blow or to throw with a rotary motion” (3) (4)

### 2.4 Food storage:

There was no known agriculture and as hunter-gathers they tended to use what they had

and there were no signs of food storage.

#### 2.5 Sexual division of production:

The men were often in charge of making fire and hunting to provide food for the family. While the women often carried for the children, gathered food, and made small items like baskets. (4)

#### 2.6 Land tenure:

Weapons, ornaments, and other objects could be owned individually, though there was no individual ownership of land. Evidence suggests that each community in each society controlled access to a 300- to 5,600-square-kilometer territory. (8)

#### 2.7 Ceramics:

While no ceramics were made the Aborigines were known to make shell necklaces and baskets out of woven plants like kelp. (7)

#### 2.8 Specified (prescribed or proscribed) sharing patterns:

Food was shared according to strict rules so that the old and young would be provided for. (6)

#### 2.9 Food taboos:

They did not eat fish other than shellfish and certain tribes had rules whether and individual ate the male or female kangaroo and wallaby. (4)

#### 2.10 Canoes/watercraft?

The Aborigines were believed to have boats and canoes, which they used for fishing. (4)

### **3. Anthropometry**

#### 3.1 Mean adult height (m and f):

“In stature they were somewhat small, the men rarely over 5ft 6in and the women considerably smaller about 5ft.” (3)

#### 3.2 Mean adult weight (m and f):

No specific weights could be found but they were noted as small in height and “generally quite muscular” (3)

### **4. Life History, mating, marriage**

#### 4.1 Age at menarche (f):

“At puberty, boys were initiated through a ceremony involving scarification, naming, and the presentation of a fetish stone. There evidently was no comparable ceremony for girls.” (8)

#### 4.2 Age at first birth (m and f):

For modern women, in the Australian Commonwealth the median age is 28.9 in the year 2010 but no information could be found for Aboriginal women. (9)

#### 4.3 Completed family size (m and f):

“In 2006, females in Tasmania had given birth to an average of 1.9 children. In 2005, Tasmanian women had an average of 2.10 babies, the second highest rate in the country” (10)

#### 4.4 Inter-birth-interval (f):

#### 4.5 Age first marriage (m and f):

The median age of people married in 2008 was 32.7 years for males and 30.1 years for females. (9) For Aborigines men and women were married in their late teens. (4)

#### 4.6 Proportion of marriages ending in divorce:

“In 2008, over half of all divorces involved children. The crude divorce rate decreased slightly over the last five years, from 2.9 in 2003 to 2.3 in 2008. In 2007, the median duration of marriage prior to divorce was 14.3 years.” (9) (Rate per 1000 marriages) While divorce happened among the Aborigines it was rare. (4)

#### 4.7 Percent marriages polygynous, percent males married polygynously:

Currently, in Australia polygamy is illegal and it has been noted that the Aborigines people were “invariably monogamous”. (4)

#### 4.8 Bride purchase (price), bride service, dowry?:

After the arranged marriage the two families would exchange gifts throughout the early part of her life. Also new brides had value because they could help with food gathering and carrying belongings. (6)

#### 4.9 Inheritance patterns:

#### 4.10 Parent-offspring interactions and conflict:

Women were the primary care takers for the children as the men were often off hunting. (4)

#### 4.11 Homosexual activities, social attitudes towards homosexuals:

No evidence of homosexuality in Aborigines

#### 4.12 Pattern of exogamy (endogamy):

The Tasmanians were believed to be exogamous and marry from other communities. (8)  
(4)

#### 4.13 What is the belief of the role of males in conception; is paternity partible? Are these “other fathers” recognized?

#### 4.14 What is the belief of the mother’s role in procreation exactly? (e.g., “receptacle in which fetus grows”)

#### 4.15 Is conception believed to be an incremental process (i.e., semen builds up over time)?

- 4.16 Occurrence of sexual coercion, rape
- 4.17 Preferential category for spouse (e.g., cross cousin)
- 4.18 Do females enjoy sexual freedoms?
- 4.19 Evidence of giving gifts to extramarital partners or extramarital offspring
- 4.20 If mother dies, whose raises children?
- 4.21 Adult sex ratio: number of adult males divided by number of (reproductive) females  
“At 30 June 2010, the sex ratio of the total population for Australia was 99.2 males per 100 females. At age 0, the sex ratio for Australia in 2010 was 105.3 males per 100 females.” (9)
- 4.22 Evidence for couvades
- 4.23 Different distinctions for potential fathers (e.g., lesser/younger vs. major/older)
- 4.24 Kin avoidance and respect?
- 4.24 Joking relationships?
- 4.25 Patterns of descent (e.g., bilateral, matrilineal) for certain rights, names or associations
- 4.26 Incest avoidance rules
- 4.27 Is there a formal marriage ceremony?  
Ceremonies at marriage are unreported. (8)
- 4.28 In what way(s) does one get a name, change their name, and obtain another name?
- 4.29 Is marriage usually (or preferred to be) within community or outside community? (m/f difference?)  
Marriage was usually outside the community. (8)
- 4.30 Are marriages arranged? Who arranges (e.g., parents, close kin)?  
Arranged marriages were reported. (8)
- 4.31 Evidence for conflict of interest over who marries who:

### **Warfare/homicide**

- 4.14 Percent adult (male) deaths due to warfare:
- 4.15 Outgroup vs ingroup cause of violent death:

Bands would be known to fight each other over territory causing members to die in combat. However they were known to avoid warfare. (3) (4)

#### 4.16 Reported causes of in-group and out-group killing:

Out-group killing was reported, as bands were known to ambush and have fights with other bands killing them. (4)

#### 4.17 Number, diversity and relationship with neighboring societies (external relations):

There are 48 known bands with estimates in the 70-85 before European arrival. The bands formed larger political groups known as tribes based on location, language, cultural traits, and often intermarried and traded with each other. (4)

#### 4.18 Cannibalism?

No reported cannibalism

### **5. Socio-Political organization and interaction**

#### 5.1 Mean local residential (village) group size:

The average nomadic group was known as a band which consisted of around 50 members and was led by a man who was generally older and a skilled hunter (4).

#### 5.2 Mobility pattern: (seasonality):

“No local band maintained exclusive rights to the resources within its boundaries, so that visiting patterns created inter-group relations. Thus hosts in one season became guests in another. Movement was largely seasonal, but it was also determined by personal inclination relation to settlement of feuds and obligations.” (4)

#### 5.3 Political system: (chiefs, clans etc, wealth or status classes):

The Aborigines used tribes as political systems. Tribes were based on location, language, cultural traits, and often intermarried and traded with each other and fought along side each other. (4)

#### 5.4 Post marital residence:

Women once they married moved to their husband's band. (4)

#### 5.5 Territoriality? (defined boundaries, active defense):

Bands had certain territories that they lived in but due to seasons they would travel to another band's area and other times that band would travel to theirs. However, band's home territory was owned and they would fight over it. (4)

#### 5.6 Social interaction divisions ? (age and sex):

Women often cared for the children and gathered goods while the men would go off and hunt. (4)

#### 5.7 Special friendships/joking relationships:

#### 5.8 Village and house organization:

“Hearth group camped and cooked around a single fire and on the west coast occupied a single hut. Its core was a “family” consisting of a husband, wife, and children and other relatives and sometimes friends and other relations. The total ranged from two to eleven people.” (4)

5.9 Specialized village structures (mens’ houses):

5.10 Sleep in hammocks or on ground or elsewhere?

5.11 Social organization, clans, moieties, lineages, etc:

The social organization of the Aborigines was broken into three groups. The hearth which was the family group, the band which was the basic social group, and tribes the larger political group. (4)

5.12 Trade:

Bands were known to trade with other bands when they came together as a tribe. (4)

5.13 Indications of social hierarchies?

There didn’t seem to be a social hierarchy other than in the bands a single male was the leader of the group and he was often an older skilled hunter. (4)

## **6. Ritual/Ceremony/Religion (RCR)**

6.0 Time allocation to RCR:

6.1 Specialization (shamans and medicine):

“Part-time shamans used bleeding, sucking, baths, massage, and vegetal remedies to cure illness or treat injuries. They also relied on the supernatural, which they reached through possession trance and a rattle made from a dead man's bones.” (8)

6.2 Stimulants:

6.3 Passage rituals (birth, death, puberty, seasonal):

“The deceased was disposed of as quickly as possible, usually by cremation and then burial of the bones and ashes, although some bones might be retained to be worn by relatives. During the night of the burial, the entire community assembled around the grave, where they sat and wailed until dawn. Widows cut and burned their bodies and cut off their hair and placed it on the grave. Each person was believed to have a soul which lived on after death as a ghost. The afterworld was thought to be much like the real world, except for the absence of evil.” “At puberty, boys were initiated through a ceremony involving scarification, naming, and the presentation of a fetish stone. There evidently was no comparable ceremony for girls.” (8)

6.4 Other rituals:

### 6.5 Myths (Creation):

Creations myths varied throughout the island from the first Aboriginal who had a tail like a kangaroo, to a star god who tumbled to earth at Toogee Low and who was turned into a large stone. Also epic sea voyages are hinted at. (4)

### 6.6 Cultural material (art, music, games):

“In addition to dances, the Tasmanians decorated trees and their huts with charcoal figures of people and objects and sang of the heroic deeds of the singers and their ancestors. The most elaborate form of artistic expression was reserved for body adornment. Men colored their hair and skin with charcoal, clay, and grease and both sexes wore colored feathers and flowers in their hair. Both sexes also scarified their extremities and rubbed charcoal in to produce rows of dark scars.” (8) They also made necklaces out of shells, baskets from plants, and were known to paint. (7)

### 6.7 Sex differences in RCR:

#### 6.8 Missionary effect:

The British when they arrived effectively wiped the Tasmanians out due to disease and warfare around 1830 (1)

#### 6.9 RCR revival:

No revival because the culture has been all but lost

#### 6.10 Death and afterlife beliefs:

See 6.3

#### 6.11 Taboo of naming dead people?

There was a taboo of naming the dead. (8)

#### 6.12 Is there teknonymy?

None listed

#### 6.13 Briefly describe religion (animism, ancestor worship, deism, magic, totems etc.)

“Tasmanian religious beliefs focused on ghosts and their influence on the affairs of the living. While they might occasionally be considered beneficial, spirits of the dead were mostly feared and thought to be the source of much harm and suffering. Consequently, burial spots were avoided and the names of the dead tabooed. They also believed in categories of spirits more powerful than ghosts, including a thunder demon, a moon spirit, and harmful spirits who occupied dark places such as caves and tree trunks. Magic and witchcraft were important and death and sickness were always attributed to the action of evil spirits or witchcraft. The bones of the dead and certain stones were believed to be imbued with protective, curative, or malevolent powers.” (8) The religion is described as based on totems. (4)

## 7. Adornment

### 7.1 Body paint:



Men were known to paint their bodies. (8)

#### 7.2 Piercings:

#### 7.3 Haircut:

Both sexes wore colored feathers and flowers in their hair. (8) “Men loaded their scalp hair with a mixture of grease and ochre, twisting the individual ringlets into tubular masses which hung around their head like strands of a mop and almost concealed the eyes. They either allowed their beards and moustaches to grow naturally or trimmed them short.” (4) Women however cropped their heads closely only leaving a short amount of hair. (4)

#### 7.4 Scarification:

Boys at puberty went through scarification. (8) “Both sexes also scarified their extremities and rubbed charcoal in to produce rows of dark scars.” (8)

#### 7.5 Adornment (beads, feathers, lip plates, etc.):

Men wore loops of twisted sinews loaded with ochre around their necks and sometimes suspended the jawbone of a dead friend from around their necks. (4)

#### 7.6 Ceremonial/Ritual adornment:

#### 7.7 Sex differences in adornment:

See 7.3. In summary the men had long very decorative hair while the women had relatively short hair.

#### 7.8 Missionary effect:

No missionary effect on religion because the colonization wiped them out.

#### 7.9 Cultural revival in adornment:

### **8. Kinship systems**

#### 8.1 Sibling classification system:

#### 8.2 Sororate, levirate:

#### 8.3 Other notable kinship typology, especially cross-cousin (MBD/FZD) typology (Crow/Hawaiian/Omaha etc.):

### **9. Other interesting cultural features (list them):**

#### **Numbered references**

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