

South East 1642

We were gathering some mutton-fish when we saw two floating islands with tall trees coming towards us from the sea. Our children were frightened.

They thought that it might be evil spirits coming to get them. Not even our wisest Elders could explain what they were. We were frightened and ran back to the scrub.

Oyster Bay 1772

Strange floating islands with tall trees came near the beach not far from our camp. People with white faces and wearing strange coverings came in two large canoes onto the shore. The Elders were not sure who they were – if they were good or bad spirit ancestors.

One of the Elders went down and greeted them with a burning firestick as a sign of welcome. The white-faced people appeared to accept the welcome, and more of us walked down onto the beach. They seemed interested in our weapons, tools and necklaces, so we swapped some of our tools for some of theirs.

We were puzzled – why were they here? As a third craft full of these strange white spirits came towards the shore, we became concerned that there were too many of them.

We warned them and signalled for them to go back. We threw some rocks and spears. We wanted to scare them off but they kept on coming! The white spirits pointed sticks at us. They made a loud bang! Some of our people felt sharp burning pains and began bleeding. One of our men fell on the beach and died.

Who sent these bad spirits? Why had they come? We were scared and ran.

Risdon Cove 1804

Today we were hunting wallaby and kangaroo for an important ceremony at the camp of the Mumirimina people. A big mob of people were coming, including the Big River people.

We were driving the animals towards the river as we had always done, when we saw strange shelters. White-faced people were standing next to them. They pointed their sticks at us. We were frightened, but kept on chasing the kangaroo and wallabies towards the river.

Suddenly there was much thunder, smoke and awful burning smells. Many of our people fell down bleeding. Many of them were dead. At our camp tonight there is much sadness and crying over the killing and hurting of so many of our people.

North East 1804

Four strange craft carrying many white people came from the sea to our land. We watched them and waited for two days before gathering our group together to welcome them.

The 'white ones' gave us gifts – we think they must be payment for using our food and land. They had many gifts but only let us have a few. These gifts were not enough in return for using our land and food. So we returned the next day and pulled down one of their shelters. We told them to leave our land and go back to the sea. One of the white men set off his stick. This caused one of my brothers to die and another to begin bleeding very badly.

We have watched the white people for a while now. They continue to break important rules.

South East 1806

There has been no rain for a long time and no new growth since the last burnings.

White people are stealing more and more of our land and food. Our people are becoming hungry. We are having trouble finding enough food.

We have been putting up with the whites stealing our animals. There used to be plenty, but we cannot let our people go hungry while white people take our food. We have tried to drive these people from our land and away from our food, but they kill and hurt us with their sticks.

North East 1810

Our children are going missing. We have heard that this is happening in other places too. Our Elders tell us that this is being caused by the bad spirits. We should hide when we see or hear them.

At night, we sing and dance and listen to stories told by the Elders. Sometimes white men come and steal young women and girls. Many of our men have been killed while trying to stop these white robbers.

South West 1823

Our land is being stolen by the whites at an alarming rate. We are very upset by this. The white people have taken our grasslands and our food. Many of our people are dying. We know this is being caused by the whites but we don't know why.

There are more white people than us now.

Big River 1824

We have decided to try to force the white people to leave our lands.

We have been prepared to share our land and food with them but they don't seem to want to share their things with us.

The whites do not seem to be intending to leave. They hunt our food, use our land and pathways but do not let us hunt their food or use any of the land they have taken.

We will fight the white people and try to drive them from our hunting grounds and back out to sea if they continue to use the land without following our rules.

Northern Midlands 1825

Our people are dying from strange illnesses that we have not seen before.

Our medicines do not stop us from dying. We believe the white people are causing these illnesses.

This is a very sad time for us. Our Elders are dying with all of their knowledge. Our babies are dying before they grow.

North 1825

The Pal.lit.tor.re people from the Meander River area have told us that they are being attacked and brutally treated by white men. White people are building barriers across their hunting grounds. There are stories about murder and ill-treatment of our people at the hands of white people – they do it for fun and are proud of it!

A boy from the Pal.lit.tor.re people told us he saw some white men get his mother to show them how she climbs large trees. She gets **timita** (possums) from their nests in the high branches. When his mother reached the nest, the men pointed their guns at her and fired.

The boy's mother fell from the tree and died. The white men laughed.

North West 1826

Our largest hunting grounds at Woolnorth have many of the white people's strange animals on them. They won't share these animals with us, even though they are on our hunting grounds. The white men who have come here treat us very badly. They try to kill us or hurt us whenever they see us. We do not understand why they do this. Elders believe these pale people are bad spirits. We do not trust them and have learned to stay away from them.

Recently about 30 or 40 of our women were mutton birding up the coast. A large group of white men riding on horseback began chasing and shooting them. The white men threw all of the women and children off the cliffs onto the rocks below. They were all killed.

There is much sorrow and anger in our camp.

The men decided that they will try to kill all the white people's animals and burn their huts to drive these people from our land.

Ben Lomond 1830

Walyer, a woman from the Emu Bay people, came to our camp last night. She has been in the white people's camps. She warns us that they are planning to send many white men with guns to fight against us and force us out of our homelands. She told us that they are noisy and brightly coloured. When they travel through the bush it will be easy to hide from them.

Our people are frightened and angry that the white people seem to want to take all of our land from us. They have already taken a lot of our land and food. They seem to want more and more and yet offer us nothing in return. We thought the white people might have stayed a little while and left again, but it seems that they are here to stay.

Big River 1831

A group of people including **Manalakina** visited our camp. They have seen many more boatloads of pale people arriving. **Manalakina's** group say that the number of whites is much greater than the number of us. If we continue our war against them, in the end we will probably all die. The white Elders want to reach an agreement with us. They want to know what our terms are for stopping the war.

We held talks around the campfires throughout the night. After much discussion it was agreed that we would stop the war. We would give up the land that the whites have already taken. In return for this we can live in the remaining areas (north-east, west, south-west and Bass Strait Islands). We can continue to make seasonal visits to our homelands for food, trade and ceremonial purposes without fear of being attacked by white people. The white Elders must also provide us with food, shelter and clothing forever, to make up for the land they have taken.

We will agree to take refuge on some coastal islands while the white Elders make arrangements for their people to share our land. **Manalakina** and others who speak the language of the white people informed Robinson, who said the white Elders accept our terms to stop the war. Soon we will be able to return to our own lands. Some of our people do not trust this white messenger, Robinson.

Flinders Island 1833

There are more of our people arriving here from their homelands. We have great ceremonies and there is much singing and dancing to celebrate the new arrivals.

About thirty of our people have died of white people's diseases this year. We cannot speak much of this suffering as we are too sad to talk. We are being forced to stop using our languages, our own names, singing our songs and performing our dances. We are being told that we must believe in the white people's spirits called 'Jesus' and 'God'.

We do not like being here. We look forward to the white messenger, Robinson, keeping his promise of coming to collect us for return to our homelands.

Flinders Island 1839

Many more of our people have died.

We are feeling betrayed and let down. We know now that Robinson is not going to keep his promise. Dr. Jeanneret, the white man who is now in charge, treats us badly. He jails us if we use our own language or if we won't be his slaves.

North West 1841

The Governor has finally agreed to my request to allow my mother to leave Wybalenna to come and live with us. I cannot remember my mother, as I wasn't even two years old when I was taken to live with the Mountgarret family. It has been very sad knowing my mother is being held captive on the island and that there is much death, sickness and sorrow there.

I am so happy she is coming; she will at last be free again. My children will be able to learn from, and teach things to, their own grandmother. Too many children of my people have missed out on this important part of growing up.

Aboriginal women on the islands 1800s

If the women take biscuits or sugar, the white men tie them to trees and stretch their arms and flog them. There is lots of blood and lots of crying.



Flinders Island 1847

There are only forty-seven of us left here at Wybalenna. We are to be taken to a place white people call Oyster Cove. This pleases us, but there is also a great sadness and despair. We have kept our word and maintained our part of the agreement with the government, but they have not yet kept to theirs.

We are very sad that conditions forced on us led to many more deaths of our people here at Wybalenna. A deep sadness has been upon many of us. We really miss our home. **Trukanini** and My.yung.ge know Oyster Cove and are looking forward to going there.

Oyster Cove 1847

We are disappointed when we arrive at Oyster Cove. This place is considered unfit for white prisoners, but they say it is okay for us!

It was hard moving to Oyster Cove. We left knowing that many of our people had died at Wybalenna. We know that many Aboriginal families are living on the Bass Strait Islands. At least at Oyster Cove we can hunt and fish in our own way. It's great to go on hunting trips, as it means we don't go back to that awful place for weeks at a time.

Cape Barren Island 1897

We have decided to petition the government for land to be returned to us. We have our own newspaper and health benefit organisation but it is hard to keep going.

The government and the church do not like us trying to be independent. They do not support our attempts to improve conditions for our people.

Cape Barren Island 1912

We object to having a government overseer on the island. Our letter to Parliament, which seventy-two of us signed, said “...we do not require any person to oversee us and rule over us...we are quite capable of managing our own affairs.”

Why are we not allowed to manage the island ourselves?

Cape Barren Island 1930s

The school teacher took one of the boys to the front of the class and scrubbed his legs with a brush until they bled because the teacher thought they were dirty. We don't like the school teacher, we think he wants to rub the colour off our skin.

Some scientists have come here to measure our heads and bodies and cut bits of skin and hair from us. They say they are doing it for science. The scientists call us hybrids and half-castes.

Cape Barren Island 1950s

The government does not want to recognise us as Tasmanian Aboriginal people and has cancelled all services to the island. This is forcing us to move to the Tasmanian mainland to places such as Invermay, Penguin and Moonah.

We have great difficulty getting jobs when people find out where we are from. Other kids call our kids niggers, half-castes and dirty Abos. This hurts our children and us, but our kids are the ones who get into trouble when they try to set the name-callers straight.

Hobart/Launceston 1960s

The police seem to pick on our family. My uncle was put in jail for being drunk. My cousin is in for swearing at the cops. Dad hasn't been able to get a job because people reckon us 'half-castes' are lazy.

Mum hasn't got enough food to feed us kids. When I was out with my cousins the cops pulled us up and blamed us for stealing and other crimes.

The cops called us 'boongs' and 'coons'. We called them 'pigs'.

I'm now in jail because I belted a bloke for calling my sister a 'dirty half-caste'. At least in here I get to see some of my relations!

Over one hundred and fifty years have gone by and we are still oppressed by the whites. We are frustrated and confused. People are racist towards us because we are Tasmanian Aborigines and yet they say there are no real Tasmanian Aboriginal people.

Tasmania Today

When we reflect on the past we remember the hurt and sorrow our people have suffered.

Public apologies, recognition and acceptance are part of the healing process.

Creating a new future where our history is known, our culture is respected and our children are proud to be Aboriginal is important to us.

Walk in our shoes, see through our eyes and journey alongside us... the Tasmanian Aboriginal community.