

Basic Detail Report



Ningher Canoe

Vessel number

HV000849

Date

2014

Description

Ningher canoes are the unique traditional watercraft of Tasmanian Palawa, Aboriginal, community. In 2007 the

practice of constructing these canoes was revived for the first time in almost two hundred years by Brendon (Buck) Brown, Tony Burgess, Sheldon Thomas and Shayne Hughes. This group constructed a 17ft Tuylini stringybark canoe for display in the Ningina Tunapri exhibition at the Tasmanian Museum and Art Gallery (TMAG). This canoe is now on permanent display at TMAG. A second canoe built from this period was successfully launched in the sheltered waters of Cornelian Bay on the River Derwent. Ningher's are constructed of locally sourced material, including juncus reed to provide buoyancy and bindings that lash the canoe together made of swamp grass. Materials used in construction vary dependent on the region, stringy-bark common in the south; paper-bark in the north-west; and reeds in the east. Naming terminology for the canoes follows the material type, 'Ningher' generally denoting paperbark and 'Tuylini' stringybark. The approach to construction is the same. Three to five bundles of bark or reed are lashed together with fibre cord and tapered at the ends so that the bow and stern rise high out of the water. Fire can be carried on a bed of clay and the canoe propelled by a pole, or by a person swimming alongside. There are many early European depictions of Ningher canoes, such as the engraving by French naturalist Francois Peron held in the ANMM collection. During his 1807 voyage with Captain Nicholas Baudin in the corvette Geographe, Peron was making his way overland to Port Cygnet in search of a watering place for his ships when he identified two canoes laid up on the shore. He described these as: "Made of three rolls of bark, bound together with string, each was equipped with a clay hearth containing a smoldering fire." These canoes were used by Tasmanian Aboriginal communities to journey to offshore islands to hunt food seasonally, such as mutton birds and seals. An 1831 account from Aboriginal leader Wurati (Woorady) notes long and dangerous voyages to islands as far as Eddystone Rock and Pedra Blanca, up to 25 km off-shore: "Their catamarans was large, the size of a whaleboat, carrying seven or eight people, their dogs and spears. The men sit in front and the women behind" - Woorady, as told to G.A. Robinson This paperbark Ningher canoe at Spring Bay was constructed during an Indigenous boat building workshop held in 2014 at the Museum of New Art (MONA) in Hobart during its annual Dark Mofo festival in conjunction with the AWBF. It is 12ft6inch (LOA) and 2ft5inch (Beam). The following passage describes this process, and is adapted from ANMM signals article 'Reviving Ancient Traditions' by Professor Greg Lehman and Fiona Hamilton: Professor Greg Lehman and Fiona Hamilton as cultural producers, and an Indigenous canoe master , assisted by other Indigenous Tasmanians, went about building a traditional Tasmanian

canoe known as a Ningher. This process was about reviving this ancient practice of canoe-making by bringing together the marine technology and history of Tasmanian Aboriginal culture. From gathering local raw materials – such as juncus reed to provide bouyancy – from across the island, to painstakingly tying together bundles of bark and reed with hand made string from swamp grass, and finally to the historic journey along the river Derwent to Watermans Dock in Sullivans Cove, history was being made and old traditions and culture were being revived. The Ningher voyage carried the makers to a place of ceremony and was acknowledged in the old language, the Tasmanian Aboriginal language of connection to the past. Ancestral stories, knowledge and spirit converged with old language and contemporary ingenuity, determination and culture. Tradition, survival and innovation characterize the richness of Tasmania’s deep history. Compiled with the assistance of ARHV Steering Committee and Council member Peter Higgs and the Tasmanian Museum and Art Gallery <https://shapingtasmania.tmag.tas.gov.au/object.aspx?ID=35> This vessel was approved to the ARHV under the Exemplary Class Vessels category. Vessels in this category set exceptional technological design standards, and/or indicate high standards of performance achievement, social impact, and innovation. For further details on the criteria for Exemplary Class Vessels please visit the ARHV About page.