

## Newcastle Aboriginal Culture

The landscapes of the Newcastle coastline, including rock platforms, are of cultural and spiritual significance to the Awabakal and Worimi peoples. They are acknowledged as the first peoples of Newcastle (*Muloobinba*). Their connections are conveyed through their stories, land use and Aboriginal naming of significant landforms .

Aboriginal people lived a very rich and vibrant existence in and around *Muloobinba* and the *Coquon* (Hunter River). Food was abundant in marine life and bush tucker. Ceremonies and feasting were generally times for sharing of resources and trading of implements with inland and coastal clans. Shell middens at *Meekarlba* (Honeysuckle) and a tool making site at *Pillapay Kullaitaran* (Glenrock Lagoon) are remnants of those communal gatherings.

Natural landscape features and known culturally significant sites include *Whibay Gamba*, Newcastle's famous landmark Nobbys. It is said that a notorious kangaroo jumped from *Tahlbihn Point*, at the site now known as Fort Scratchley, to the safety of *Whibay Gamba*. The kangaroo remains hidden in the islands bowels and occasionally thumps its tail making the land tremble. The thumping is said to be a reference to the region's earthquake activity.

There is also a high cliff named *Yi-ran-na-li*, renowned for being a fearful place. *Yi-ran-na-li* must be respected by all and people should not linger in its vicinity.

Reference: Newcastle City Council 2007

## Sources

AWABA-A database of historical materials relating to the Aborigines of the Newcastle Lake Macquarie Region.

[www.newcastle.edu.au/centre/awaba](http://www.newcastle.edu.au/centre/awaba)

University of Newcastle

The virtual Coquun-Hunter river Project; Rediscovering the coquun:towards an environmental history of the Hunter River.

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[www.newcastle.edu.au/service/archives/chrp/albrecht.html](http://www.newcastle.edu.au/service/archives/chrp/albrecht.html)

Newcastle City Council

[www.ncc.nsw.gov.au](http://www.ncc.nsw.gov.au)

Aboriginal Heritage Study: Newcastle Local Government Area

Australian Museum

[www.amonline.net.au](http://www.amonline.net.au)

National Parks and Wildlife Service

[www.nationalparks.nsw.gov.au](http://www.nationalparks.nsw.gov.au)

and further reading.



## Lifestyle

Aboriginal people have lived on the Australian coast for many thousands of years. They have found food and raw materials in a variety of coastal environments and habitats.

On the coast occupation sites are places that show where Aboriginal people have lived, and give us an insight into their lifestyles before and during colonial occupation.

Occupation sites can be found in shell middens. These are places where the debris from eating shellfish and other food has accumulated over time. Few middens comprise of only one species of shellfish, although many south of Newcastle contain species from one habitat: rock platforms. In the area north of Newcastle, middens made entirely of pipis have been found. Pipis, a beach species, were an important food resource in the Aboriginal economy.

Shell middens also contain evidence of other Aboriginal activities providing important information about how local Aboriginal people lived. These include:

- Remains of hearths and cooking fires
- Tools made from stone, bone or shell
- Burials

Local Aboriginal people used various fishing and gathering techniques. Canoes were used for both line and spear fishing, as well as hauling in lobster catches. Both men and women caught fish, but used different equipment: men used multi-pronged spears while women used a hook and line. The men fished from rock platforms and canoes while the women fished only from canoes.



## Rocky shore food

Shellfish were collected by hand from rock platforms as well as sandy/muddy intertidal shorelines of the coast. Species included oysters, mussels, limpets, nerites, turban shells, periwinkles, tritons and cartrut shells.

Birds such as the muttonbird (shearwater) may have been eaten and their bones used as points and barbs for prongs for fishing.

Crustaceans including lobsters were eaten however the remains don't survive well in archaeological deposits.

Fish archaeological records show a variety of fish were eaten in the coastal zone and included snapper & bream, mullet, flathead, groper, morwong and tarwhine.



Red Triton



Canoe Tree

## Tools of the rock platforms

### Fishing Gear

Fishing gear was designed to be portable, lightweight and small in size. It consisted of spears for the men and hooks, lines and sinkers for the women.

**Fishhooks** curved but not barbed usually made from shell but wood, bird talons and bone were also used.

**Fishing line** made up of 2-ply twine from the bark of plants including the cabbage tree palm *Livistonia australis* & the Kurrajong tree. Fibres from Settlers Flax were also used. Small stones were tied to the lines to act as sinkers.

**Net bags & bark baskets** made from 2 ply twine which was made from bark or other fibrous plant material.