

Natives Of New Holland.¹
by
Captain Phillip Parker King, R.N.

The coasts of this continent, in proportion to its great extent, are very thinly peopled—a circumstance that is perhaps occasioned by the enmity and warfare that exist between the neighbouring tribes. Each tribe speaks a different language from the other; and in a comparative vocabulary of the languages of four different parts of the coast which I formed, the only one of forty words that is similar in all is that for the eye. Not thus dissimilar, however, are their weapons. The spear is universal, as is also the throwing-stick; the *boomerang* or *woodah*—a short crescented weapon, which the natives of Port Jackson project with accurate aim into a rotatory motion, which gives a precalculated bias to its forcible fall—was also seen at Port Bowen on the east coast, and at Goulburn Island on the north. Some of the natives have been described to use the bow and arrow; but I have never seen any weapon like it among them. The canoes of the several tribes differ both in construction and material. In some parts, particularly about the colony at Port Jackson, they are made of one piece of bark, tied up at each end. Farther north, at the tropic, they are hollowed out of the trunk of a soft-stemmed tree (*Erythrina indica*), and are so narrow as to require an outrigger to prevent their oversetting. On the north coast they are made out of the bark of trees,² neatly and firmly joined by strips of the stem of the *Flagellaria indica*, a small climbing plant. Farther to the westward, at Hanover Bay, the natives cross the water upon a raft, made of short logs of dead mangrove trees, which when decayed are very buoyant. At Dampier's Archipelago, instead of a canoe, the natives also use the decayed mangrove, but it is only one log, on which “they sit astride, and move it along by paddling with their hands, keeping their feet upon the end of the log, by which they probably guide its course. Such are the shifts to which the absence of large timber has reduced these simple savages. They show that man is naturally a navigating animal; and this floating log, which may be called the marine velocipede, is, I should suppose, the extreme case of the poverty of savage boat-building all over the world.”³ MS. Journal.

All the Indians that we have seen on the coast of New Holland have long curly hair, which they dress in various fashions, and often daub it over with the oil of the whale or the seal, by which means it becomes clotted and entangled. Their bodies are also smeared over with this oil, mixed with a red or white pigment, which gives them not only a hideous appearance, but a very disagreeable smell.

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1. Excerpted from his “On the maritime geography of Australia”, *Geographical memoirs on New South Wales*, ed. by Barron Field. London: John Murray, 1825, pp. 269–295. (Read 2nd Oct., 1822, before the Philosophical Society of Australia).
 2. So at Van Diemen's Land is the catamaran; and Dr. Falconer (*On Mankind*, p. 287,) says, that the Canadian savages form boats from the bark of trees, in which, however fragile in appearance, they perform long voyages.—Editor.

The natives of King George's Sound are the only Indians that we have seen clothed; and these wear a mantle of kangaroo-skin over their bodies, leaving the right arm only bare.

The spear-throwing-stick seems a universal weapon, except at Van Diemen's Land; for we have seen it, although differently shaped, in all parts of this continent, namely, on the south-east coast, at Port Jackson, on the north-east coast at Endeavour River, at Hanover and Vansittart Bays, on the north-west coast, and on the south-west coast at King George's Sound.⁴ The spears also generally differ, and in many parts they are very large and unwieldy. In the southern parts of New Holland, where the grass-tree (*Xanthorrhoea hastile*) grows, the spears are generally made of its flower-stem; but where these plants are not found, the natives make their spears of other trees, which are hardened and straightened over a slow fire.

The savages are very careless and indifferent about presents, excepting in those parts where they are accustomed to be visited; and in some places they have shown themselves neglectful of knives or axes, even after the use of these instruments has been explained to them; and whereas in other parts they have evinced a great desire to possess those obvious improvements upon sharp stones or shells.⁵

Articles of dress they justly despise, on account of the warmth of their climate; but at King George's Sound they were happy to receive any thing which they could use as clothing. The demand, however, at this place is only of late date; for Captain Flinders found all his presents to these very people thrown away, and left upon the bushes near his tents.

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3. "Their mode of fishing in the Red Sea is somewhat strange. They throw in the water a part of the trunk of the doomt-tree, perhaps ten or twelve feet long, at each end of which is a piece of wood attached in a horizontal direction, so as to prevent the tree from turning round. At one of the ends a small pole is stuck upright to serve as a mast, on the top of which there is a piece of wood horizontally fastened, as that below. A woollen shawl thrown over it, and fastened at each end, and to the piece of wood horizontally fixed below, forms a kind of sail, and the two fishermen mount on the large trunk, like on horseback, and by way of a cord attached to the middle of the sail, they take the wind, more or less, as is required."—Belzoni's *Researches in Egypt, and Nubia*, p. 327.
 4. The natives of Pumice-stone River, Moreton Bay, with whom, during our stay among them, we were on the most friendly terms, and whose manners and customs we had uncommonly favourable opportunities of observing, form (I believe) another exception; for among them we never saw the throwing-stick; and when shown to them by our Port Jackson native, their attempts to use it were extremely clumsy. Nor did they make use of any contrivance in lieu of it, but invariably threw their spears from the hand.—J. Uniacke.
 5. *Ferrum est quod amant*, is the universal character of savages; but the natives of the Marquesas long neglected our iron tools, and they belong to the same race as the Friendly and Society Islands. See *London Missionary Voyage*, pp. 134, 135. So the natives of Navigator's Islands would barter with La Pérouse for nothing but beads. See his *Voyage*, chapters xxiii, xxiv, and xxv.—Editor.