

LIVING IN THE HIGH COUNTRY

FOOD SOURCES

Taungurung people journeyed to the Alpine peaks in spring to feast on the Bogong Moth (*Agrotis infusa*) that could be found seasonally aestivating at high elevations in vast assemblages sheltered within the deep fissures and crevices between huge masses of granite rocks.

The moths were easily collected by being smoked out of inaccessible crevices or knocked off the walls into a wooden carrying dish or a net. Such fine mesh nets were made from the fibre of the shrub Bootlace Bush (*Pimelea axiflora*).

The moths were then thrown into hot ash and coals on a rock slab, left to roast for a couple of minutes, winnowed to remove the dust and ash, and eaten. The roasted abdomens are the size of a small peanut and have an oily consistency and flavour similar to roast chestnuts.

Sometimes the moths were also ground into a paste using a smooth stone and a container and made into cakes. These would only keep for a week but by smoking they were able to be preserved for a much longer period and could be carried down the valley for later use.



Mammals were also of primary importance to the Taungurung diet with possums, kangaroos and wallabies, wombats, as well as reptiles and birds hunted in the Alpine region.

Plants growing at high altitudes and only accessible during summer were also an important food source for large gatherings of Taungurung people in the mountains during the warmer months. The Alps provided a plentiful supply of plant foods and a supply of medicines that were not available at lower altitudes.



Yam Daisy (*Microseris lanceolata*)

One important staple food are the tubers of the 'Murnong' or Yam Daisy (*Microseris lanceolata*). The easiest time to find the tubers would be in summer when the plant is in flower, when its bright yellow flowers would clothe the tops of the ranges. Yam Daisy would have been a plentiful food source in the high country prior to the introduction of European grazing. While the Yam

Daisy can still be found it is now occurs in depleted numbers. Other vegetable foods which were food sources above 1500 metres are the tubers of Orchids (*Orchidaceae*), the native Carrot (*Geranium spp.*), the seeds of Native Flax (*Linum marginale*), Fern roots (*Blechnum spp.*) and a number of berries, such as Coprosma species and Native Raspberry (*Rubus parvifolius*).

THE ARCHAEOLOGICAL RECORD

Artefacts that provide direct evidence of Aboriginal occupation in the Alpine area are minimal. This is in part due to limited surveys and the lack of ground visibility in the region, and the fact that stone artefacts are the only items that are durable enough to have survived in the archaeological record. However the archaeological record for the Mount Stirling/ Mount Buller region is also minimal due to the fact that Taungurung people visiting for summer months had a "tool kit" adapted to high mobility.

'The most noticeable feature of the equipment of the Aborigines of the Southern Uplands is its meagreness. A few spears for hunting and fishing, a spear thrower, a stone axe for chopping and a skin cloak for keeping warm for the men, whilst the women would have little more than a digging stick, a cloak and a carrying vessel. To this list can be added a number of commodities which clearly had importance in local Aboriginal material culture. These were skins of possum and kangaroo,

bark for making shelters, shields, etc., wood or grass tree for spear shafts, ochre for ceremonial purposes, hard rock for making axes and sandstone for resharpening the edge' - (Flood 1980)

Ground stone axes and sharpening stones have been located at high altitudes at Mount Buller. This is conducive with the presence of a Greenstone Axe Quarry located at lower altitudes on the Howqua River, providing a localised supply of suitable stone.

Smooth river pebbles have also been located and recorded at high altitudes at Mount Stirling (see display) with the smoothness and roundness that would make them suitable for the processing of Bogong moths.

The scarcity of rock shelters means that the great majority of Aboriginal occupation sites in the Alpine region are open campsites, usually in relatively close proximity to a river, creek, lake or spring. Camps would be situated on spurs or in naturally open flats in a sheltered position to provide for a reasonable good view of approaches.



TAUNGURUNG – ACTIVELY MANAGING COUNTRY

Through the support of the Australian Government's National Landcare Programme, Taungurung Clans Aboriginal Corporation are today actively and directly involved in managing the Alpine Region through a successful partnership approach with Mt Buller Mt Stirling Resort Management and the Goulburn Broken Catchment Management Authority.

Works undertaken by the Taungurung team include protection of Alpine Bogs; a rare vegetation community found in permanently wet sites in the high-rainfall headwaters of many of Victoria's major rivers. Apart from their intrinsic conservation value, bogs have important Nationally recognised hydrological and ecological functions. Alpine Bogs are under constant threat from exotic weeds including Blackberry and Willow, as well as being significantly impacted by feral animals such as Deer.

Taungurung people working on Country are also actively surveying and recording for the presence of Aboriginal cultural heritage, constantly building the knowledge and cultural mapping of Country.



Smooth river pebble used by the Taungurung people to process Bogong moths.