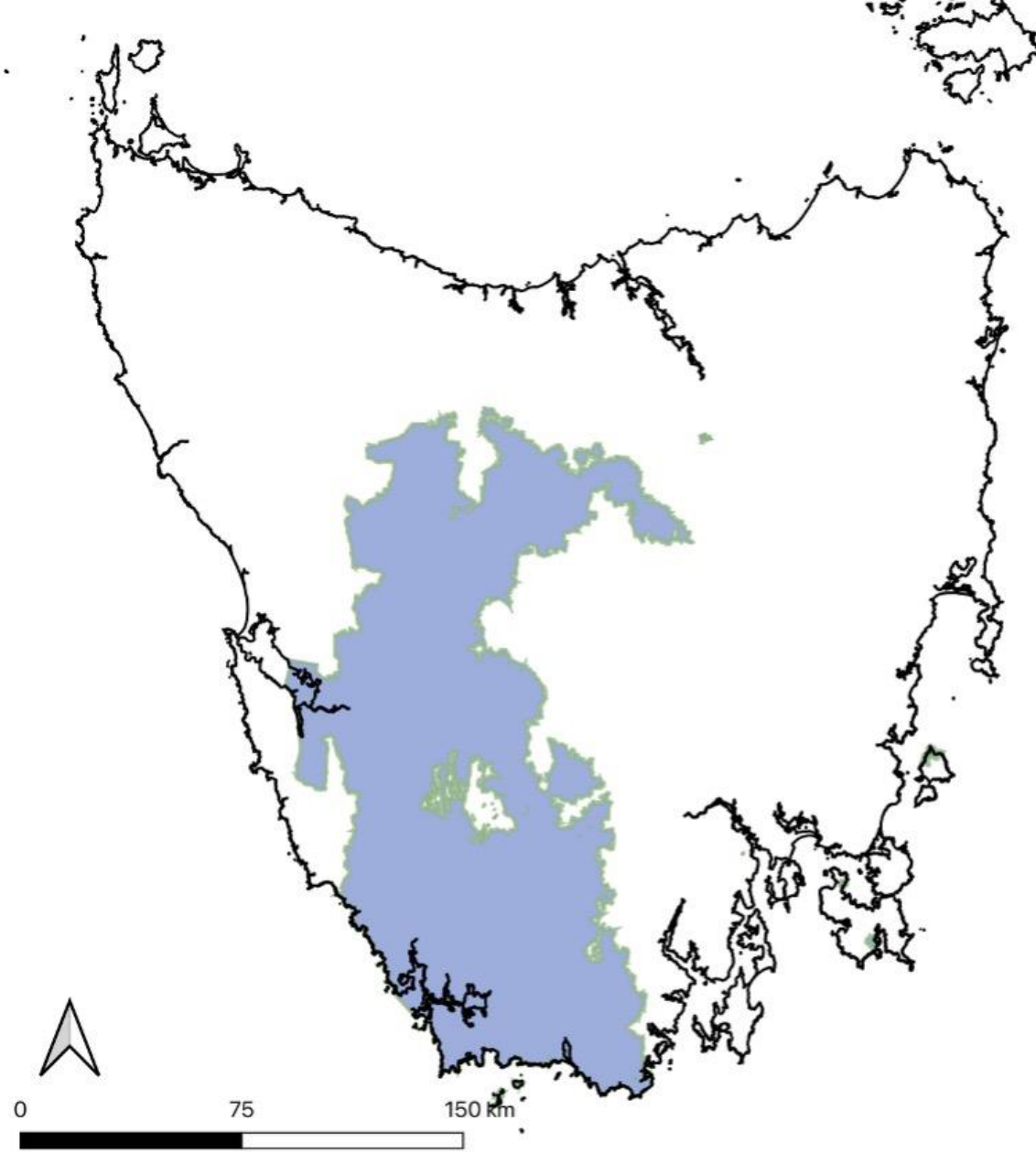


The Role of History in Returning Fire to Country (TWWHA)

Image: Lester, L. Lehman, G; Cahalan, S; Mikosza, J; Rimmer, Z; Styger, J; Taylor, R; Wilson, C. and Bowman, D (2023)
Understanding the use of fire by Aboriginal people in the Tasmanian Wilderness World Heritage Area (TWWHA): Research review and recommendations. Report for Aboriginal Heritage Tasmania, Department of Premier and Cabinet, Tasmanian Government, Hobart.



— Coastline
■ Tasmanian Wilderness World Heritage Area

Key Desired Outcome 4.5

Aboriginal cultural
values are
adequately
accounted for in
fire planning in the
TWWHA.

(DPIPWE 2016, Tasmanian
Wilderness World Heritage Area
Management Plan 2016, Department
of Primary Industries, Parks, Water
and Environment, Hobart).

TASMANIAN WILDERNESS

WORLD HERITAGE AREA

(TWWHA)

MANAGEMENT PLAN

RESEARCH REVIEW AND RECOMMENDATIONS

Understanding the use of fire by Aboriginal people in the Tasmanian Wilderness World Heritage Area (TWWHA)

Report for Aboriginal Heritage Tasmania, Department
of Premier and Cabinet, Tasmanian Government

Image: Lester, L. Lehman, G;
Cahalan, S; Mikosza, J; Rimmer, Z;
Styger, J; Taylor, R; Wilson, C. and
Bowman, D (2023) Understanding
the use of fire by Aboriginal
people in the Tasmanian
Wilderness World Heritage Area
(TWWHA): Research review and
recommendations. Report for
Aboriginal Heritage Tasmania,
Department of Premier and
Cabinet, Tasmanian Government,
Hobart.

Isabel McBryde,

‘So the hope that a careful sifting of all available historical sources will enable us to compensate with ethnohistories for our missing regional ethnographies may prove illusory.’

(McBryde, 1979, p.141)

Evaluating colonists' observations

- Veracity
- Accuracy
- Extent of observations

‘... everything points to the conclusion that they [Tasmanian Aborigines] were an unchanging people in an unchanging environment.’ (Pulleine, 1929, p.310)

Evaluating the (mis)use of historical documents



FOUNDATIONAL DATA



TIMESCALES



INTERPRETIVE
METHODOLOGIES



GEORGE AUGUSTUS ROBINSON

From an oil painting by Benjamin Duterran, in the Tasmanian Museum, Hobart.

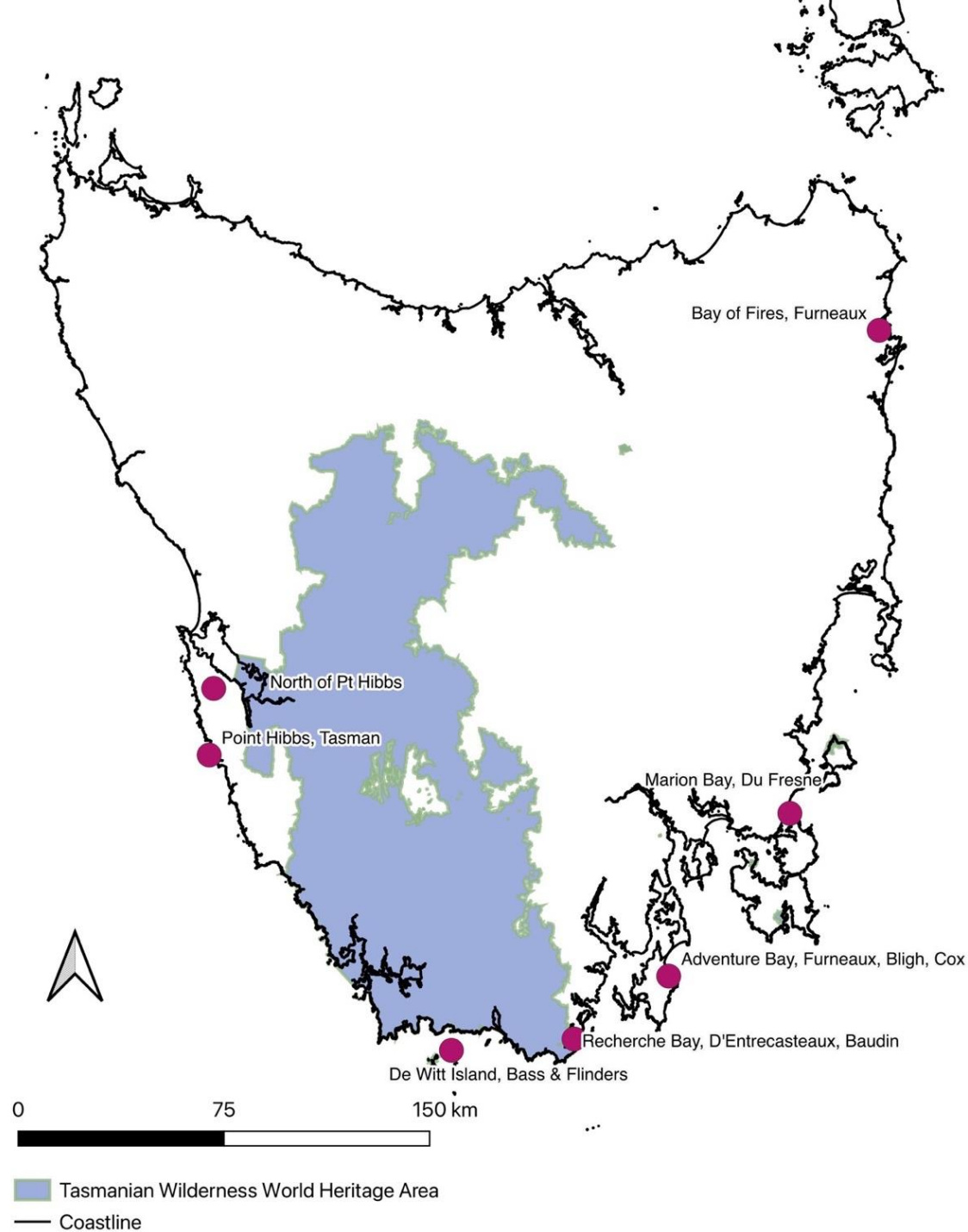
FRIENDLY MISSION

The Tasmanian Journals and Papers of
GEORGE AUGUSTUS ROBINSON
1829-1834

Edited by
N. J. B. PLOMLEY

TASMANIAN
HISTORICAL RESEARCH
ASSOCIATION
1966

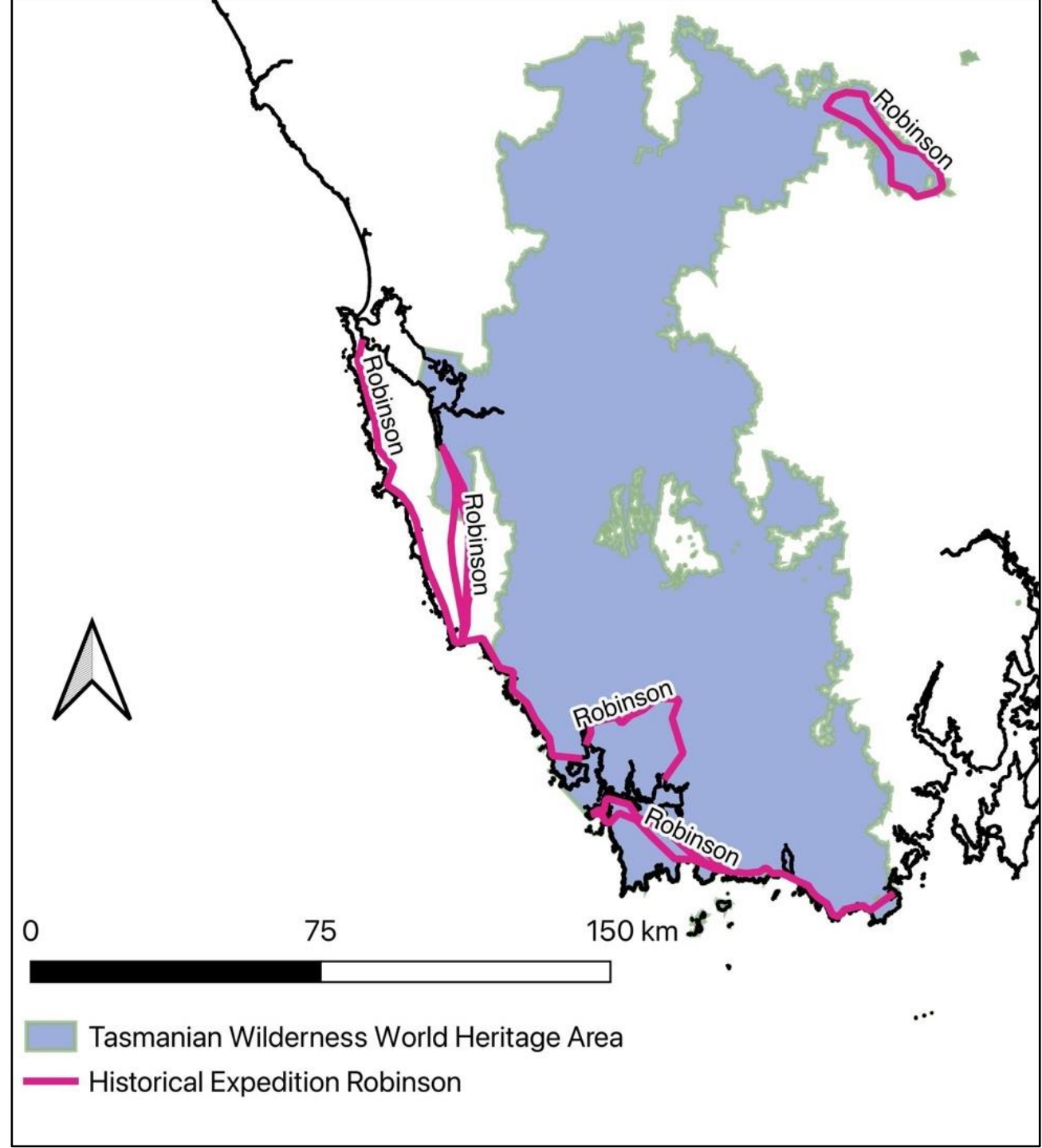
Pre-1803 fire observations



There is the obvious danger of using the literature uncritically as a source of convenient ethnographic parallels, or to build unstable reconstructions on selected evidence.

The need for strict source criticism can easily be neglected or by-passed when the historical sources are mined as information quarries to provide basic material for comparative studies (McBryde, 1979, p.140).

Robinson in the TWWHA



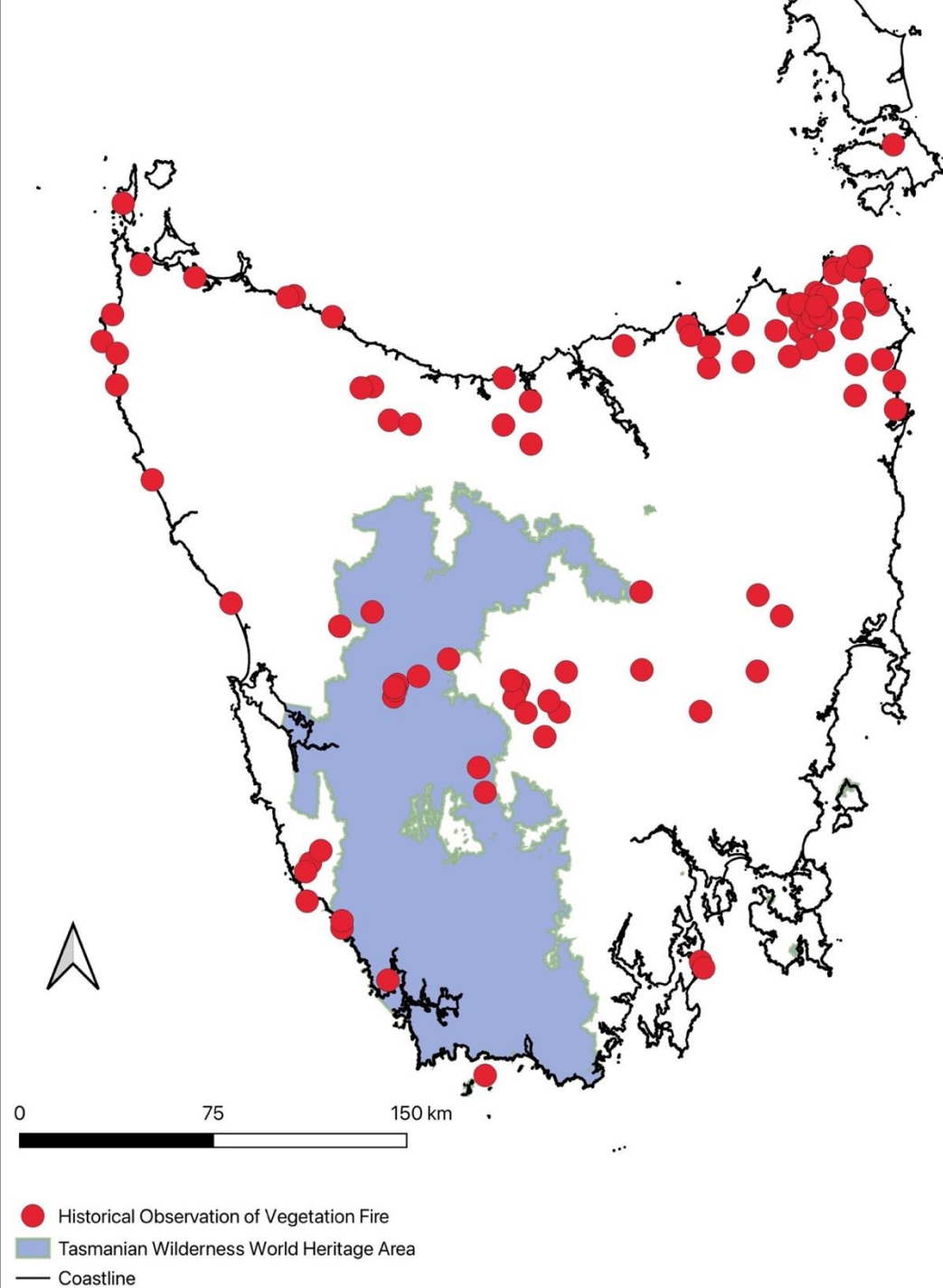
Direct observations of Aboriginal people burning vegetation in the TWWHA

Colonist	Date	Location
Goodwin	March 1828	Vale of Rasselas
Robinson	16 March 1830	Whitehorse Plains
Robinson	25 March 1830	Giblin River

Interpretations of burnt ground being caused by Aboriginal people

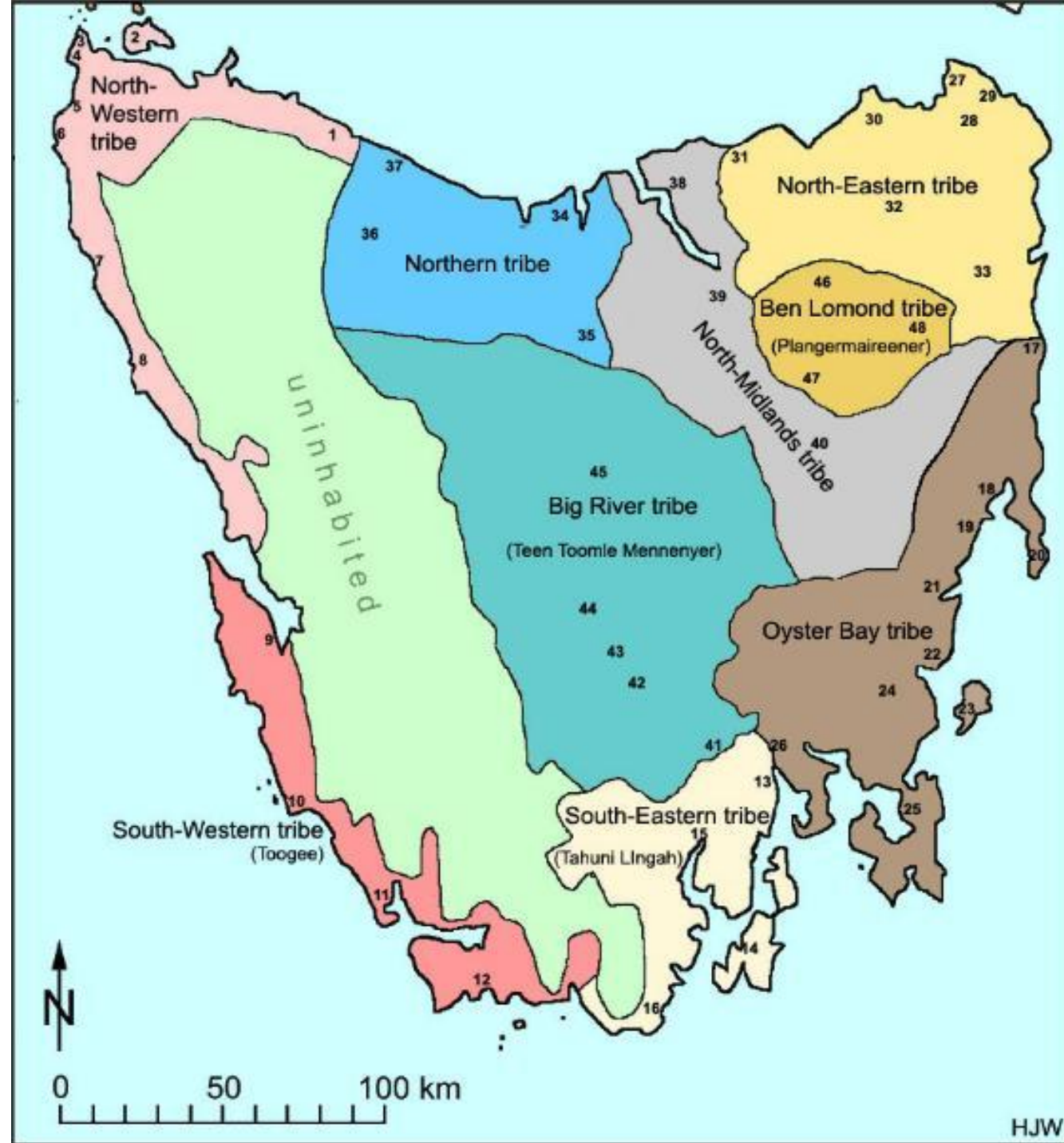
Colonist	Date	Location
Bass & Flinders	January 1799	De Witt Islands (Louisa Bay)
Sharland	8 March 1832	Lake St Clair
Sharland	11 February 1832 8, 10 & 11(2) March	Calders Lookout, Loddon Plains, Painters Plains
Darke	April 1833	Vale of Rasselas
Calder	13 December 1847	Loddon Plains
Gould	January 1860	Eldon Range

TWWHA observations and Robinson beyond TWWHA





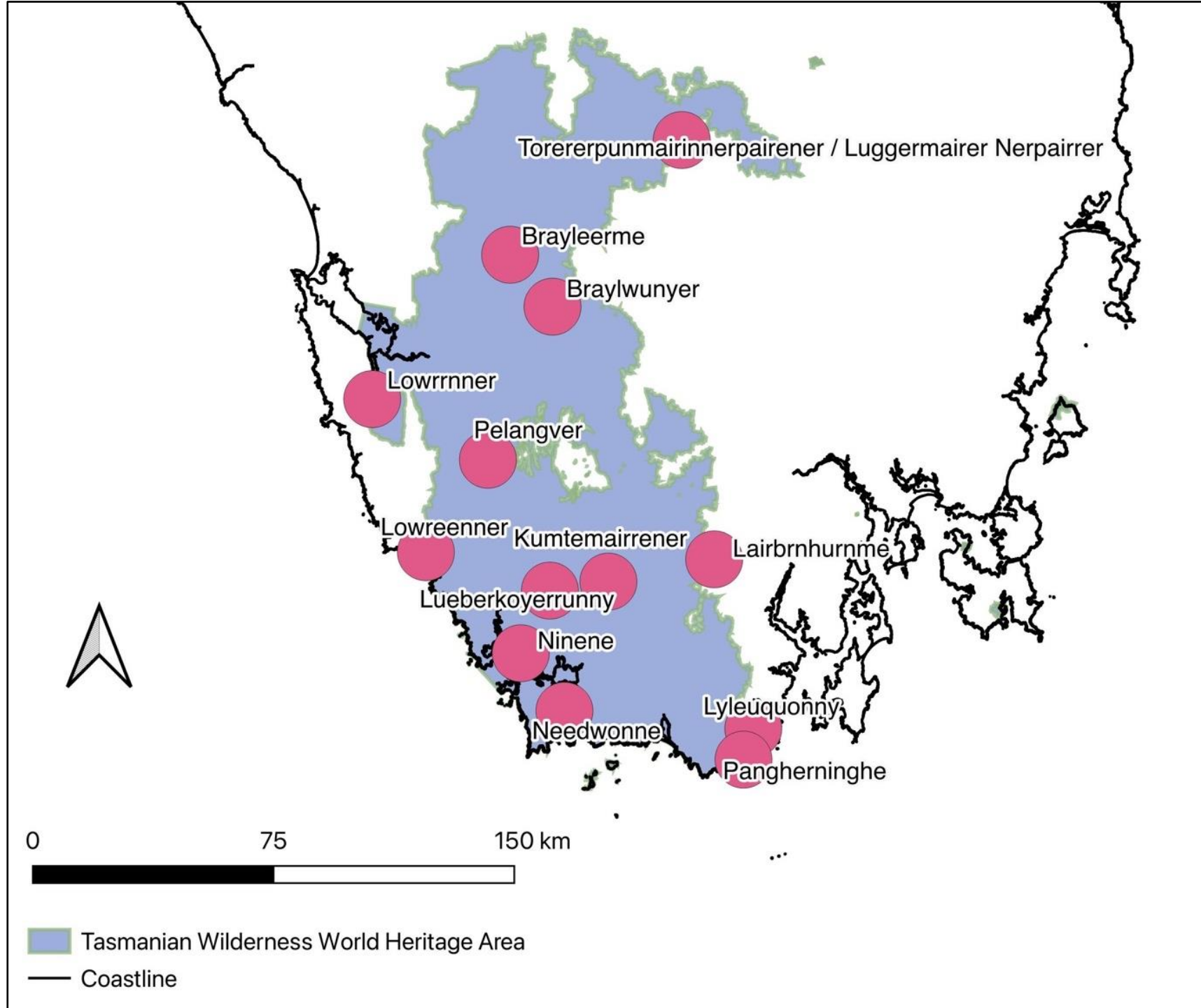
Tindale, 1974.



HJW

Image:
<https://habitatadvocate.com.au/tag/tasmanian-aborigines/>

Aboriginal groups in the TWWHA (Plomley)



Goodwin, March 1828, Vale of Rasselas

‘ ... saw a number of natives’ fires on the hills, and the grass appeared to have been burnt recently and frequently’
(Goodwin, CSO 1/27616658).

Robinson, March 1830, Kelly Basin

‘Whilst the party was removing the things they descried the smoke of the natives’ fire near to where I purposed erecting my tent. Upon these natives seeing the party they immediately fled to the mountains, setting the plains on fire as they fled to alarm the rest of their tribe and for the women to go away’ (Plomley, 1966, 131).

Darke, May – June 1833, Vale of Rasselas

‘several trees newly hacked and on searching we found a native hut, nearly new with a rug in it. This confirmed me in my own opinion that these plains are frequented by natives in the summer, and who, most probably, take up their quarters at Port Davey during the winter (Darke's Journals, LSD, 1/19.1/72, in Thomas, 1991, 95)

Sharland, 1832, near Lake St Clair

‘Saw two native huts during the day, but very old, near Mount Charles. The grass on the marshes appears to have been burnt during the early part of the summer’ (Sharland, Report to Legislative Council 1861, p. 4).

Not a day

Not a season

Not a year

Not one group

Not one generation



Can 'history' contribute anything of value?

- Paucity of documents
- Incidental information
- Very limited number of authors
- Personal and political biases
- Editorial contributions
- Brief period of time
- Uncritical interpretations across several disciplines





Copyright From the collection of the Art
Gallery of South Australia,
Adelaide
Morgan Thomas Bequest
Fund 1951

Creator John Glover, artist, 1832.
A corroboree of natives at
Mills Plains



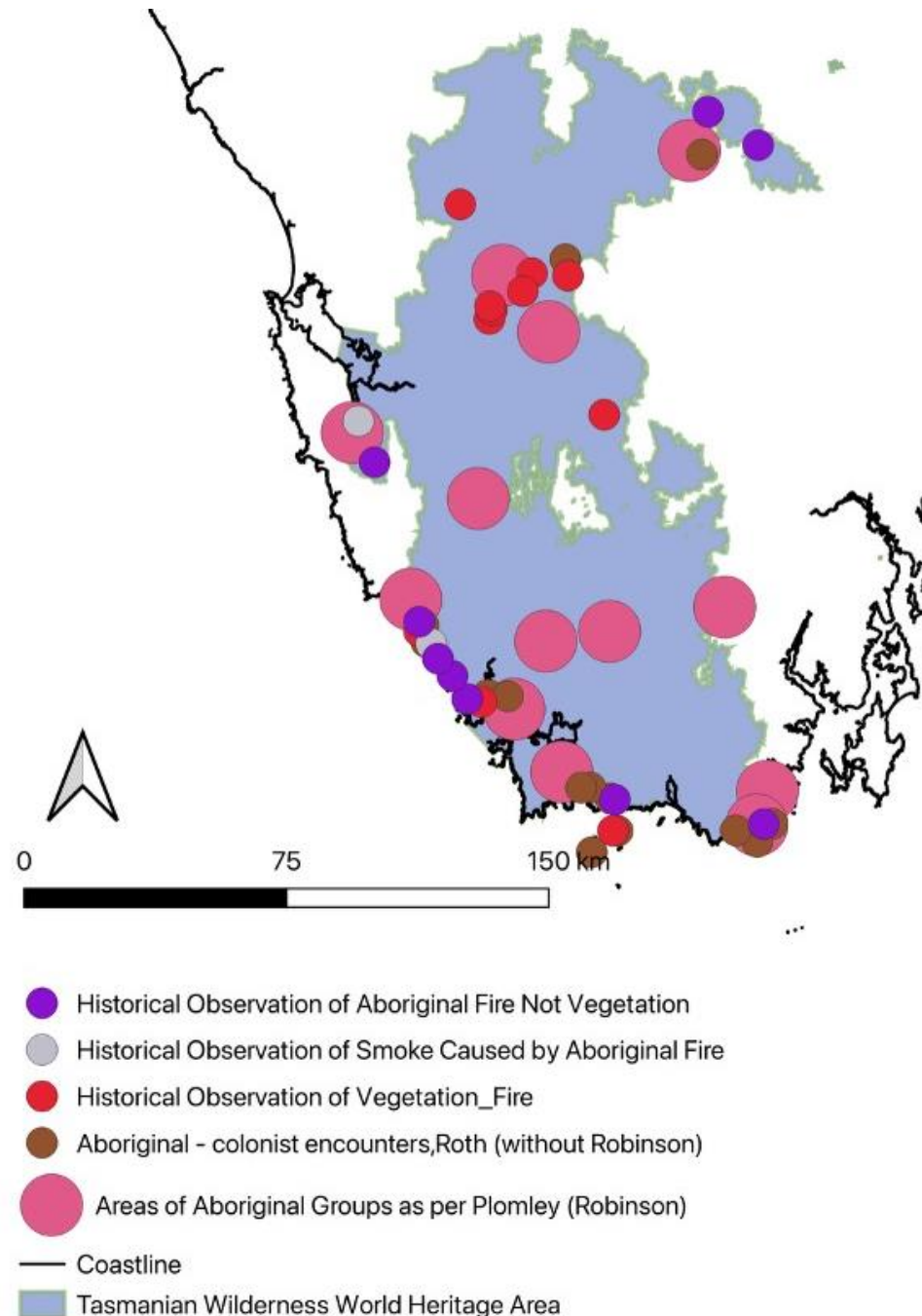
As the chief always carried a lighted torch I asked them what they did when their fire went out. They said if their fire went out by reason of rain they [were] compelled to eat the kangaroo raw and to walk about and look for another mob and get fire of them. They must give fire and sometimes they would fight afterwards. Mannalargenna said that the two men in the sky first gave the natives fire, that they stood all around. Woorraddy said Parpeder gave fire to the Brune natives (Plomley, 1966, p. 567).

Plomley,

This statement that the natives made fire by striking a spark with one of their stone flaked tools is an error, perhaps due to Robinson's inexperience, perhaps to misunderstanding what he was told.

(Plomley, 1966, Footnote 5, p. 225)

Historical
observations
of Aboriginal
campfires,
smoke,
vegetation fire,
etc



A multi-disciplinary approach

