



Jack of Cape Grim: A Story of British Invasion and Aboriginal Resistance

Jan Roberts

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You may have read about American Indians who resisted the loss of their lands. This book tells how the Aborigines in Australia fought similarly in defense of their lands along a most savage frontier. Jack of Cape Grim is a unique and rare account, based on original unpublished handwritten diaries and correspondence, and on Aboriginal memories, of an intrepid band of Aboriginal women and men who fought to protect their lands, resisting three military expeditions sent after them. Melbourne in 1839 consisted of tumbledown wooden houses and roads so muddy that horses and carts sunk out of sight, yet it was a magnet for the younger sons of aristocrats who arrived accompanied by tens of thousands of sea-sick sheep. Nearby the Aborigines had stone walled homes with roofs so strong that settlers reported they stood the weight of a horse, and extensive fish farms - all of which was soon to be destroyed. This is the story of an incredible cultural clash in one of the remotest parts of the British Empire. Many Aboriginal Elders thought the end of days had come. They said the dead had returned, for everyone knew that ghosts were white! They said these must not be resisted. Other Aborigines took every opportunity to study the technology bought by these strangers - and others, more astutely perhaps, said these new arrivals were savages from overseas and must be immediately resisted. Among the later were a group of three Tasmanian women, including Truganini, a woman famous for her beauty among the settler leaders and wrongly reputed to be the last of her people, and two Tasmanian men including Jack of Cape Grim. They had no hope of returning to their tribal lands, so eventually decided they must make a last stand. This is their story of how they outwitted the British army sent against them and drove settlers back into town, but only to be finally betrayed. However these women then won their way back to Tasmania and continued to struggle for their land. Today, near Cape Grim in Tasmania, where Jack's folk were thrown over a cliff, some of their people's descendants still hunt the mutton bird. Australian government funding has been granted for a film script based on this book and negotiations are proceeding. The author Jan Roberts worked for some 17 years with Aboriginal people and their organizations on civil rights issues. Her articles have appeared in the Melbourne Age and Sydney Morning Herald as well as in the Independent and Financial Times in the UK. Her films have been shown on television in the USA, UK and Australia.

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