

## **The Larrakia people of the Darwin Area: the Archaeological record.**

Archaeological sites are valued records of Aboriginal occupation and use of the Darwin Harbour. As the researchers comment, during archaeological surveys Larrakia consultants were able to contribute to the interpretation of these sites, through knowledge of present-day hunting and gathering practices. For the Larrakia people, archaeological sites are part of a continuing practice of hunting and gathering, and integral to the connection and ownership of country. For this reason, this chapter takes the view that Larrakia use of sea and bush foods, plants and other resources is integral to any discussion of archaeological 'sites'. As detailed in the following paragraphs, an earlier Federal Court judgement also made the connection between the archaeological sites and Larrakia food gathering in the present.<sup>1</sup>

In the Larrakia native title case, Mr Justice Mansfield discussed hunting, fishing and gathering bush foods, as well as the use of plants for medicines and crafts (Mansfield 2006: 571-599). However, the judge was unconvinced that such practices were distinctly Larrakia or evidence of pre-sovereignty connection to country. The Northern Territory Government also submitted that the evidence of fishing and hunting practices was not distinct to the Larrakia community, 'since rules about sharing, conserving and not wasting are taught by both Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal parents to their children' (Mansfield 2006:581).

A somewhat different conclusion was made by Douglas Williamson in 1998, after hearing evidence regarding Larrakia use of mangrove areas at Wickham Point.<sup>2</sup> Williamson (1998) commented, 'Most of the archaeological sites are associated with the mangrove zone around the harbour – an area rich in food sources for Aboriginal people in the past and in the present.' In support of this statement, Williamson refers to an affidavit by Mr Risk stating that access to the mangroves is regarded as particularly important. The affidavit described a range of activities such as obtaining fish, crabs, prawns, food and other materials, and hunting and camping. However, in the hearing the NT Government contended that no anthropological evidence had been produced by either native title party that there are any areas or sites of particular significance within the boundaries of the acquisition areas (Williamson 1998).<sup>3</sup>

---

<sup>1</sup> Williamson, Douglas 1998 Northern Territory of Australia/Bill Risk on behalf of the Larrakia People (DC 96/7); Tibby Quall on behalf of the Danggalaba Clan(DC 96/4)/Phillips Oil Company Australia, [\[1998\] NNTTA 11](#) (19 September 1998). Application No. DF 97/1. National Native Title Tribunal

<sup>2</sup> *ibid*

<sup>3</sup> Williamson found that there are no registered Sacred Sites within the acquisition area

Although Williamson (1998) commented that it was difficult to assess the full impact of the proposed acquisition in the absence of a formal determination of native title, he found the evidence of continuing rights and interests to be convincing. Because of their relevance to the Inpex Blaydin Point project, the following sections of Williamson's judgement are quoted at some length:

The Government party has vigorously sought to minimise the significance of the evidence about the present-day activities and connection of the native title parties with the acquisition area, and the likely effect of the proposed acquisition upon those matters. Nevertheless, on the evidence presently before the Tribunal I am satisfied that significant activities of a traditional nature currently take place, that the present native title parties have a sincere sense of traditional attachment to the area, and that senior people have a sincere sense of traditional responsibility. Accordingly, I am of the view that the proposed acquisition would have a substantial adverse effect upon such native title rights and interests as may exist, particularly if and to the extent that those rights are extinguished by subsequent development.

The impact of acquisition upon way of life will depend upon the nature and extent of actual development, the extent of continued access, and the protection and management of the area.

There are sites of significance to Larrakia people in areas near the acquisition area that could be affected by development within the acquisition area. Although the great majority of the acquisition area will not be developed, the requirements of safety and security in the vicinity of possibly hazardous industry may prohibit or restrict access to substantial areas of land and water.

Larrakia submissions refer to the incremental effect of successive dispossessions of native title rights, increasingly affecting the social and cultural value of 'Larrakia country'. The Government party disputes this view, contending that any loss compared to the totality of land claimed as country by the native title parties is marginal or minor. However, evidence showed that Wickham Point is particularly significant to the native title parties because of the relatively ready access from the metropolitan region of Darwin.

As discussed elsewhere in this chapter, Inpex has management practices in place that will ensure the preservation of archaeological sites, the monitoring of works near sites and the establishment of a Larrakia Heritage Management Committee, as well as complying with all statutory obligations. However, it is well to keep in mind ‘the incremental effect of successive dispossessions of native title rights, increasingly affecting the social and cultural value of “Larrakia country”’, as expressed by Douglas Williamson in the preceding quote from his judgement.

Under the heading ‘Knowledge about Location and use of Bush Foods, Crafts and Medicines’, Mansfield (2006:592-598) discusses evidence of a ‘Larrakia Plant Identikit’ prepared as part of a Parks and Wildlife Commission of the Northern Territory project. The document states that information was ‘collected, collated and edited by Lorraine Williams, Donna Jackson and Glenn Wightman’ (Mansfield 2006:Para 592).<sup>4</sup> The information came from a number of sources, including interviews with Larrakia elders Topsy Secretary, Prince of Wales and Yula Williams, as well as non-Larrakia people connected to the area, such as Lena Henry and Felix Holmes. The identikit also refers to ‘Mark Harvey’s Larrakia dictionary’.

Although it was submitted that the Identikit demonstrated ‘ongoing Larrakia knowledge and use of resources in the Darwin area’, the NT Government contended that there is nothing in the identikit to demonstrate that the information is particularly ‘Larrakia knowledge’ and the document was not proof of a continuing connection to the past. Rather, the plant identikit only indicated ‘a state of knowledge as at the time at which informants provided the information’ (Mansfield 2006:Para 593).

Perhaps of more relevance to archaeological sites is the section, ‘Methods for hunting and preparation of food’ (Mansfield 2006: Para 594-598). Mansfield describes evidence given by Larrakia witnesses on the hunting and preparation of crab, longbum, goose, turtle, turtle eggs, mussels and stingray. However, these practices were also found not to be uniquely Larrakia or evidence of continuing connection, despite the prevalence of archaeological sites containing *telescopium telescopium*, commonly known as ‘longbum’.

---

<sup>4</sup> Lorraine Williams is from the Batcho family group and Donna Jackson is from the Talbot/Browne/Kenyon group.



**Above: 'Longbums' or *telescopium telescopium* gathered in the mangroves of Darwin Harbour (Bill Day).**

Various studies have recorded archaeological sites around the Darwin Harbour that reveal information about the use of resources by Aboriginal people. As such, the sites are viewed as valued links to the past by Larrakia people today. In addition there are sites associated with Aboriginal people such as the three leprosaria were built in the East Arm region at Mud Island (1911), Channel Island (1931) and East Arm (1954). Mansfield (2006:Para 336) states that Aboriginal people formed the majority of patients of these hospitals. Archaeological research indicated that there were approximately 150 gravesites on Channel Island. Williamson (1998) refers to a 1998 report from an archaeologist consultant, Scott Mitchell, who says the Channel Island leprosarium was established in 1885. Originally most lepers were Chinese, but from 1916 all Aboriginal lepers were interned there. The facility was abandoned in 1931.

The Larrakia Nation report (LNAC 2005) describes field surveys during the dry season of 2003/4, undertaken around Darwin Harbour with Larrakia participants that recorded over a dozen possible Aboriginal contact period sites, with five positively identified as places of Aboriginal activity. The report notes that the Sites Register held by the Heritage Branch of the Northern Territory Government shows that over 400 Aboriginal archaeological sites have been recorded in the Darwin region.

Data cited in the report (LNAC 2005) suggests that sites containing shells of mangrove species such as *telescopium telescopium* that are common in mangroves today are the result of more recent activities than middens of the *Anadara* shells that have been dated to the pre-

European period. The evidence suggests that this indicates environmental change within the last 700-500 years (Hiscock 1997). It is of interest that archaeological sites also reveal that many hundreds of years prior to colonisation there was a change in focus from exploiting the resources of the predominantly *Anadara* mudflat species to a focus on mainly mangrove shellfish (Hiscock 1997). A more recent date for surface scatters of mainly mangrove species of shellfish is confirmed by the presence of modified European material, supported by carbon dating (LNAC 2005).

An archaeologist's report submitted by the Larrakia Nation Aboriginal Corporation (2005) claims a site on the northern side of Middle Arm peninsula, immediately outside the boundaries of the Woodside Gas Plant, contains pre and post-contact archaeological remains and stone artefacts over a 100 metre area. Estimates of the minimum age for the mound were AD 1120-1240 and use of the site again in about AD 1890-1930. As the report points out, this data suggests that the Aboriginal use of the site spans some 700 years, from at least 600 years prior to and up to fifty years after European settlement. Another site, one of a dozen Aboriginal heritage places occurring in Charles Darwin National Park in the suburb of Winnellie consist of shell middens and scatters of shell, stone artefacts and WW2 bottles. The 2005 report suggests the observations 'hint at the wider [unrecorded] Aboriginal sphere' that is not necessarily reported by the non-Aboriginal record keepers of the period.

Bourke and Guse (2007) undertook an archaeological survey in October 2007 to assess the Indigenous and historical cultural heritage sites located within the proposed Wickham Industrial Estate. The survey was undertaken with the assistance of Larrakia traditional owners participating on the survey. As a result Bourke and Guse (2007:6) recorded three sites with low archaeological significance, a further three with low to moderate significance, seven containing moderate significance, three rated moderate to high, and one site containing high cultural heritage values. As in previous archaeological studies of Darwin Harbour, sites revealed the highest areas of archaeological sensitivity occur along the mangrove and woodland fringe. Away from these areas significant sites have also been shown to occur in association with rock outcrops or elevated points in the landscape (Bourke and Guse 2007:7; see also Woolfe, Bourke and Guse 2007).

Bourke and Guse (2007:17) note that information from the sites register and other consultancy reports indicates that four historic and over ninety pre-contact sites on the database have been recorded for Middle Arm Peninsula. They write: 'Most of the previously

recorded pre-contact sites are clustered on Wickham Point and around Haycock Reach on the southern coastline of Middle Arm Peninsula.’ The regulations as set out by Bourke and Guse (2007:49) afford protection to all Indigenous archaeological places that correspond to the criteria set out in the *Heritage Conservation Act 1991*. Although development proponents may apply to destroy or disturb a registered site, the NT Government assesses applications and provides advice to the Minister who may then grant or decline consent. Bourke and Guse (2007) describe this regulatory framework as a ‘specific sites-based approach’.

Bourke and Guse (2007:54) believe that the shell middens have the potential to not only address questions on the chronology of human occupation and changes in human use of the Darwin coastal environment, but to investigate in finer detail the environmental history of the area. With further research, middens could also provide information on continuity and change in Aboriginal occupation of the Darwin region, and on the incorporation of new technologies into existing Indigenous systems (Bourke and Guse 2007:55). A general awareness amongst many of the Larrakia community of the best time of year to obtain a particular resource, which part of a native animal or plant is safe to eat, and skills in knowing where to find particular animals or plants in the bush contributes to the interpretation of sites, according to Bourke and Guse (2007b:3).

On Middle Arm, the peninsula coast and small mud flats areas are surrounded by mangroves *Ceriops tagal* and *Avicennia marina*, with *Rhizophora stylosa* seaward. During the archaeological survey by Bourke and Guse (2007b:3), Larrakia field workers identified these areas as places to collect bush tucker, in particular the shellfish locally called ‘long bum’ (*Telescopium telescopium*). As stated, Mansfield (2006:Para 586-598) summarises the evidence of Larrakia hunting and gathering in a section ‘Knowledge of bush foods’. Occasionally large quantities of these shellfish are collected and divided between households and other relatives. Sometimes long bum are cooked and eaten on the site. Larrakia elder, Bill Risk, also showed the archaeologists some of the bush tucker plants available in open eucalypt woodland on either side of the Middle Arm road leading to Channel Island (Bourke and Guse 2007b:3).

### **Middle Arm petroglyphs and their interpretation**

In 2005, Heritage Conservation Services assessed the cultural and archaeological significance of the Middle Arm petroglyphs for the NT Heritage Branch (see also Bourke and Mulvaney 2003). The report found that the rock art is ‘culturally significant to the Larrakia and

Danggalaba people and archaeologically significant as the only known example of rock art within the Darwin region' (Pollard 2010:10). The Larrakia people describe the site as a 'special place' – according to Pollard (2010:10) 'special because people feel a connection to ancestors and country when they visit'. As well, archaeologists consider the rock art at Middle Arm peninsula to be a unique example of a rare type of archaeological site in a region not previously known for this kind of rock art (Pollard 2010:13; Bourke and Mulvaney 2003).

The Middle Arm Rock Art Site was recorded as a sacred site by the Aboriginal Areas Protection Authority on July 14, 2009, surrounded by a one-kilometre-radius buffer zone. This means that the provisions of the *Northern Territory Aboriginal Sacred Sites Act 1989* and the *Northern Territory Heritage Conservation Act, 2008* now both apply to the site.

Pollard (2010:45) suggests that the need for a management and interpretation plan for the rock art at Middle Arm peninsular has become urgent following recent acts of vandalism and development pressures in the area. Vandalism of rock art points to the need for an education strategy which incorporated management measures to reduce the likelihood of repeat acts. According to Pollard (2010:41) interpretative signage, walkways and similar amenities:

- attracts, engages and inspires visitors;
- aids understanding of uniqueness;
- aids damage mitigation by enhancing understanding and encourages care for places;
- answers demand for experiencing indigenous heritage;
- encourages social cohesion by giving communities a sense of place and belonging;
- has economic, environmental and social benefits.

In outlining the multi-points of principles and practices towards an 'Interpretation plan', Pollard (2010:41) notes: 'The content of signage, brochures, displays, web sites or any other form of media should be developed in collaboration with Larrakia and danggalaba people.'

### **Howard Springs Accommodation Village**

Inpex Browse is proposing to construct an accommodation facility at Howard Springs for the construction stage of the proposed INPEX gas plant on Blaydin Point, Darwin Harbour. The accommodation village site is bounded by Howard Springs Road in the west and Stow Road in the east. In 2009 Christine Crassweller (Begnaze) and Koolpinyah Barnes (Larrakia Development Corporation) conducted a one-day heritage survey of the proposed site. Crassweller (2009) reports that the land that may be affected by the project consists of Section

2819, part of Section 2818, and Parcel 273, and 4894. The survey located one archaeological site HS1, two isolated stone artefact BS1 and BS2, the remains of the Howard Springs Hospital, the historic North Australian Railway corridor and a World War II bottle dump (p.10). The report notes:

...the remains of the Howard Springs Hospital were located approximately 40 metres east of the Howard Springs Road and 200 metres north of Whitewood Road on Parcel 273. It consists of fourteen concrete floor slabs scattered across the undulating plain, (see Figure 2). The concrete in many of the slabs is in poor condition. Unlike other World War II camp sites in the region there is a lack of broken glass or metal fragments around the site, which may demonstrate that the site was never used. Crassweller 2009:15 The archaeological and historic survey of the areas of interest for the proposed construction village located one archaeological site, two isolated stone artefact and two historic sites, the remains of the World War II Howard Springs Hospital and a World War II bottle dump (Crassweller 2009:14-15).

This site has been assessed as having low significance as beer bottle dumps from the World War II era are ubiquitous in the region (Crassweller 2009:12) and are assessed as being of low to moderate significance. Crassweller (2009:14) adds that the traditional owners should be formally notified of the archaeological findings. If the sites or objects are to be disturbed the Larrakia should be given the opportunity to collect any archaeological material in the area once 'permission to disturb' has been received.





**Figure 1. Area of interest for the proposed construction village (from Crassweller 2009:4).**

### **Inpex's 'Draft Environmental Impact Statement'**

Inpex reports that archaeological surveys were undertaken throughout Middle Arm Peninsula by Earth Sea Heritage Surveys (Bourke and Guse 2007), as reported in this chapter. From these studies it can be deduced that the meeting points between the mangrove zone and the elevated higher ground are the areas richest in archaeological artefacts deposited from activities associated with the gathering and cooking of shellfish. The majority of these similar sites are located within 300 metres of the shoreline (INPEX Browse 2009:127).

According to Bourke (2005), Bourke and Guse (2007) and Crassweller (2006) there are 117 recorded archaeological sites located on the Middle Arm Peninsula west of the Elizabeth River Bridge. At the Inpex Blaydin Point site, nine archaeological sites and one isolated artefact are located close to, or within, the boundary of the onshore development area (INPEX Browse 2009:457). Three archaeological sites will be required to be disturbed during construction. They include an isolated artefact, a shell and stone artefact scatter and a subsurface midden/scatter.<sup>5</sup> INPEX will request permission from the Heritage Branch of NRETAS to move or remove these three sites. If permission is granted, advice will be sought from the Larrakia custodians on the correct procedures to be adopted for their removal (INPEX Browse 2009:457).

<sup>5</sup> The literature disputes whether an isolated artefact can be described as a 'site'.

According to Inpex’s ‘Draft Environmental Impact Statement’ (p. 457), one archaeological site described as of ‘high significance’ is located close to the proposed access road to Blaydin Point. Management of this site is the subject of consultation with the NT Department of Natural Resources, Environment, the Arts and Sport (NRETAS) and ‘the Larrakia people’ (INPEX Browse 2009:457). As well, the Larrakia Development Corporation has been engaged to develop a detailed Heritage Plan for the project in consultation with the local traditional custodians, and as outlined in Inpex’s ‘Draft Environmental Impact Statement’ (p.458).

<b>Authority Certificate</b>	<b>Subject area</b>
C2008/041	Middle Arm Peninsula and nearshore waters
C2008/042	Middle Arm Peninsula and nearshore waters
C2008/191	Marine area between Cox Peninsula and Shoal Bay Peninsula, Darwin Harbour
C2009/011	Subsea pipeline corridor within Darwin Harbour in the Beagle Gulf

**Above: Authority certificates provided by the AAPA for the onshore and nearshore development areas (INPEX Browse 2009:457).**

A provisional eight-point management plan for the project includes the establishment of a Larrakia Heritage Management Committee (LHMC) with a standing agenda and made up of representatives of the Larrakia people and Inpex. Exclusion zones have already been established by AAPA around marine sacred sites and no works are permitted within these zones. Perhaps most importantly, the employment of Aboriginal people as monitors during the project construction will hopefully avoid damage to sites, as explained below:

Monitoring will be undertaken for Aboriginal heritage sites. This will involve inspections by Larrakia representatives prior to and during the construction phase and during the commissioning and operations phases. Photographic records will be maintained for each of the sites (INPEX Browse 2009:457).

## **Conclusion**

The research commissioned by Conoco Phillips and Inpex has greatly added to the knowledge of Aboriginal pre-contact and contact period archaeological sites around the Darwin Harbour. The recording of these sites has employed consultants from Larrakia groups, including members of the Danggalaba clan, Larrakia Nation Aboriginal Corporation and Larrakia Development Corporation. Working with the Larrakia consultants has contributed to the

interpretation of archaeological deposits by reference to present-day hunting and gathering practices.

Although use of fishing and gathering of shellfish bush foods is not a uniquely Larrakia practise or proven to be evidence of native title rights and interests, the incremental effect of the loss of access to areas within relative easy access to Darwin will be detrimental to Larrakia people and others.

As discussed in another section of this report, Larrakia people generally take a pragmatic view by weighing the loss of land against the employment opportunities developers like Inpex will provide. In his affidavit, Bill Risk states with respect to a previous LNG project:

I have tried to take a fair approach, and so do not object, and to my knowledge most Larrakia people do not object, to Phillips building a natural gas plant at Wickham Point, as long as Larrakia law is acknowledged and Larrakia people are compensated fairly for the use of our land and for the effect of the project on our native title.....

It would help us to meet our responsibilities to the area if Larrakia people can continue to have access to the area and if Larrakia people can get jobs in the project. It would also help if Larrakia people could be involved in making some of the decisions about the project and about preventing pollution and damage to the environment. And it would be fair if the land and waters were returned to the Larrakia people after the end of the project.