

Roads and Traffic Authority

Pacific Highway Upgrade -
Oxley Highway to Kempsey
Aboriginal Heritage Working Paper

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Appendix C

Aboriginal site descriptions

Artefact scatters

The definition of an artefact scatter 'site' is often an arbitrary one, which can offer benefits from a heritage management perspective but is a source of theoretical/analytical debate for heritage practitioners. In most archaeological contexts, an artefact scatter has been defined as either the presence of two or more stone artefacts within 50 or 100 metres of each other, or a concentration of artefacts at a higher density than surrounding low density 'background scatter'. Due to the nature of the underlying evidence, its identification only within exposures created by erosion or disturbance, and the limited suitability of existing definitions, artefact scatter sites are defined within this study as the presence of one or more stone artefacts within a *survey area* (cf Kuskie 2000). The survey areas are based on discrete, repeated *environmental contexts* or *archaeological terrain units* (a particular combination of landform unit and class of slope).

Each spatially discrete location of evidence within a survey area is defined as a site locus, with the boundaries of the site locus defined by the visible extent of artefacts (ie Aboriginal objects protected under the *National Parks & Wildlife Act 1974*). However, as such a definition is somewhat arbitrary and does not necessarily reflect true cultural sites (temporally and spatially related evidence) and previous survey results lend support to the argument that artefacts are distributed across the landscape in a virtual continuum, but with evidence only identified in surface exposures or areas of disturbance, it is assumed that there is a similar probability for comparable evidence to occur elsewhere within the same survey area. Hence, while the visible site loci boundaries are defined by the extent of visible evidence (consistent with the definition of an Aboriginal object under the *National Parks & Wildlife Act 1974*), across the entire survey area in which a site is identified there exists a *potential resource* of comparable evidence.

An artefact scatter may consist of surface material only, which has been exposed by erosion, or it more typically involves a sub-surface deposit of varying depth. Other features may be present within artefact scatter sites, including hearths or stone-lined fireplaces, and heat treatment pits.

Artefact scatters may represent the evidence of:

- Camp sites, where everyday activities such as habitation, maintenance of stone or wooden tools, manufacturing of stone or wooden tools, management of raw materials, preparation and consumption of food and storage of tools has occurred.
- Hunting or gathering events.
- Other events spatially separated from a camp site (for example, tool production or maintenance).
- Transitory movement through the landscape.

The detection of artefact scatters depends upon conditions of surface visibility and ground disturbance and whether recent sediment deposition has occurred (cf Dean-Jones and Mitchell 1993). Vegetation cover and deposition of sediments generally obscures artefact scatter sites and prevents their detection during surface surveys. High levels of ground disturbance can also obscure or remove evidence of a site.

Within the study area, there is a high potential for heritage evidence to occur in the form of stone artefact deposits, in a widespread distribution of variable density across virtually all landform units (for example, ridge crests, spur crests, simple slopes, drainage depressions and flats). A number of artefact scatters and isolated artefacts have already been identified within the vicinity of the study area. A higher density of evidence is expected to occur where more focused and/or repeated Aboriginal occupation has occurred (for example, along higher order watercourses). Although recent human and natural post-depositional impacts may have affected to some extent a portion of the identified and potential Aboriginal heritage evidence, there exists potential for deposits of sufficient integrity to be of research value.

Bora / ceremonial sites

Bora grounds are a type of ceremonial site associated with initiation ceremonies. They are usually made of two circular depressions in the earth, sometimes edged with stone. Bora grounds can occur on soft sediments in river valleys and elsewhere, although occasionally they are located on high, rocky ground where they may be associated with stone arrangements.

Field survey is required to clarify the potential for this type of evidence within the study area. Several bora / ceremonial sites have been reported within the general locality, although none directly within the study area.

Burials

Human remains tended to be placed in hollow trees, caves or sand deposits. The location of burials may once have been marked by carved trees (Etheridge 1918:85), although subsequent tree clearing and the long passage of time since the disruption of this practice has rendered these markers extremely rare. Usually burials are only identified when eroding out of sand deposits or creek banks, or when disturbed by development. The probability of detecting burials during archaeological fieldwork is extremely low.

Field survey is required to clarify the potential for this type of evidence within the study area. One burial site has been reported within the general locality, although not directly within the study area.

Carved trees

Carved trees were still relatively common in NSW in the early 20th century (Etheridge 1918). They were commonly used as markers for ceremonial or symbolic areas, including burials.

Both vegetation removal and the long passage of time since the practice of tree carving was prevalent have rendered this site type extremely rare. Consequently, the potential for carved trees within the study area is considered to be very low, although cannot be discounted without field survey.

Grinding grooves

Elongated narrow depressions in soft rocks (particularly sedimentary), generally associated with watercourses. The depressions are created by the shaping and sharpening of ground-edge axes.

Grinding grooves are typically located in sedimentary bedrock along watercourses. As such, their potential to occur within the study area is dependent upon the presence of such bedrock. Field survey is required to clarify the potential for this type of evidence within the study area.

Lithic quarries

A lithic quarry is the location of an exploited stone source (Hiscock and Mitchell 1993:32).

Sites will only be located where exposures of a stone type suitable for use in artefact manufacture occurs. Field survey is required to clarify the potential for this type of evidence within the study area. The presence of tuff, a material favoured for artefact manufacture, within the Byabbara Beds between the Oxley Highway and Cooperabung Hill, indicates that there is some potential for lithic quarry sites if suitable outcrops occur.

Middens

Shell middens are a common site type in the coastal region. Middens are deposits of shell, the remains of what formed part of the Aboriginal diet. Middens may also include stone, bone or shell artefacts, charcoal, or the remains of small terrestrial or aquatic fauna, which were also a part of the diet. Middens exhibit wide variation in terms of their size, preservation and contents, and can provide significant information on land-use patterns, diet, chronology of occupation and environmental conditions.

Field survey is required to clarify the potential for this type of evidence within the study area. Considering the distance that most parts of the study area are from shellfish sources, the potential for this type of evidence is anticipated to be generally low.

Mythological / traditional sites

Mythological sites, or sites of traditional significance to Aboriginal people, may occur in any location. Often natural landscape features are the locations of mythological sites. Other sites of contemporary significance include massacre sites (the location of violent clashes between early settlers and local Aboriginals), traditional camp sites and contact sites.

Consultation with the local Aboriginal community is essential to identify these site types within the study area.

Rock shelter with art and / or occupation deposit

Rock shelters include rock overhangs, shelters or caves which were used by Aboriginal people. Rock shelter sites may contain artefacts, midden deposits and/or rock art. These sites will only occur where suitable geological formations are present.

Field survey is required to clarify the potential for this type of evidence within the study area, although on a preliminary basis this potential is assessed as low.

Scarred trees

Scarred trees contain scars caused by the removal of bark for use in manufacturing canoes, containers, shields or shelters.

Mature trees, remnants of stands of the original vegetation, have the potential to contain scars. One scarred tree site has previously been reported within the vicinity of the study area. However, considering the long time period elapsed since this practice was prevalent and the extent of vegetation removal, the potential for scarred tree sites to occur directly within the study area may be relatively low.

Stone arrangements

Stone arrangements include circles, mounds, lines or other patterns of stone arranged by Aboriginal people. Some were associated with bora grounds or ceremonial sites and others with mythological or sacred sites.

Hill tops and ridge crests which contain stone outcrops or surface stone, and have been subject to minimal impacts from recent land use practices, are potential locations for stone arrangements. Field survey is required to clarify the potential for this type of evidence within the study area. One stone arrangement has been reported within the general locality, although not directly within the study area.