

## Oxley Highway to Kempsey - Pacific Highway Upgrade

### OHK85 Test Excavation - Preliminary Results

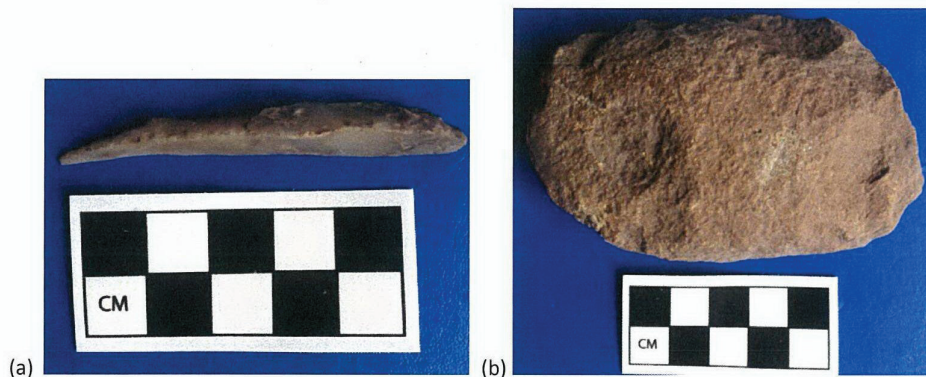
Test excavations were undertaken at an area of potential archaeological deposit (PAD), OHK85, located above the Wilson River at Telegraph Point between Port Macquarie and Kempsey. Test excavation was carried out over ten days (5 days in September 2012 and 5 days in February 2013).

The PAD was located on the end of a level-very gentle spur crest approximately 200m north of the Wilson River. The PAD area was naturally demarcated from its surroundings, as the isolated spur was surrounded on three sides by low lying floodplain, emphasising the prominence of the spur above the river. The elevated position offered a good vista over the surrounding area and river. The geomorphic context of OHK85 was Quaternary alluvial and colluvial fan deposits, consisting of fluvial sand, silt, gravel and clay. Archaeologically some potential exists in the sandy podzolic soil due to good depositional characteristics, and the location of the site above the primary floodplain.

The test excavation consisted of a total of 30 1m<sup>2</sup> test squares. Transects containing test squares were established to sample the top of the landform. All test squares were excavated in 10cm spits to the base of the artefact bearing deposit.

A well-defined portion of ground immediately east of a contemporary metal shed was identified as exhibiting an intact soil profile, with an average depth of 55cm. Test squares excavated within this portion of the site identified 1424 artefacts, with the highest frequency being 167 artefacts per/m<sup>2</sup>. Apart from the portion of ground near the shed, the deposit was found to be generally highly disturbed by contemporary agricultural activity. No historic material was identified during the excavation.

A full suite of artefacts were recovered including: cores, flakes, flake tools, finely made points, and three complete in situ axe heads. The artefacts were made from a diverse range of raw materials including: igneous, dolerite, quartz, agate/chalcedony and silcrete. Waste flakes relating to the finely made objects (axe heads and points) indicated that the objects were manufactured on site. The range of objects and materials indicated that the site was a focus point for past Aboriginal activity. Aboriginal community representatives thought the site was a camp for the preparation of weapons because it was on the disputed border between the Dunghutti and Birpai.



**Artefacts recovered from OHK85 (a) chalcedony backed blade and (b) dolerite hatchet head**

A portion of a hearth containing stone artefacts was recovered in one test square near the metal shed, around 20-50cm below the surface. A radiocarbon date of 1125 ± 37BP (Wk-36460) was obtained from charcoal found within this feature. The dated charcoal comes from the upper A1 portion (c.20cm) of the deposit. A sequence of dates for the entire section (10cm-55cm) has been submitted and results are pending. In addition, non-diagnostic bone fragments were also recovered from the test square. An examination of the soil pH found that the sandy soil was only slightly acidic (pH 6.5), such that further bone/organic materials may exist at the site.

Further archaeological deposit exists just east of the shed and possibly underneath the floating concrete slab of the shed itself. Archaeological material underneath the shed may be well preserved and protected from contemporary impact afflicting most of the surface at OHK85. Examination of the slab suggests that it is resting on the natural surface with only minimal levelling.

In summary, it is recommended that archaeological salvage be undertaken at OHK85, concentrating on the deposit adjacent and beneath the farm shed, due to the following findings:

- Intact soil structure containing in situ archaeological material
- In situ hatchet heads
- Finely made chalcedony points
- Significant quantities of artefactual materials
- Hearth directly associated with artefacts
- Sandy podzolic soils conducive to organic preservation
- Soil matrix exhibits chronologic sections for carbon and OSL samples