

VIRTUSHERITAGE



NEWSLETTER ISSUE 4

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Projects



Noticeboard



Editorial

We have had a very busy twelve months with projects, research, fieldwork, new babies, training, study and research milestones completed and growth in the company, which has held up a new issue of the newsletter. We welcome Bernadette Allen (Pottsville, NSW) and Amanda Crick (Newcastle, NSW) to our team.

Our focus for this edition is rock art, which comprises some of our core business on recent projects. Australia has some of the oldest and most impressive rock art in the world. Rock shelters with occupation deposits and/or art are important cultural sites, visually impressive but also scientifically significant as deposits can be stratified, which provides potential for dating for occupation over time. We are pleased to be involved in the sixth commissioned cultural heritage study in Queensland by the Department of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Affairs, engaged by Jabree on the Mt Tambourine Cultural heritage study, featured further in our projects section. We have some new technical partners with Dr Jillian Huntley (who I have worked with for over 12 years) and her recent appointment nearby at Griffith University. We have many interesting projects continuing in Cape York, Camden, northern NSW, Newcastle and the Hunter Valley over the coming months. We have a hefty season of excavations commencing over the next six months and look forward to sharing our experiences and results in future editions.

All the best,

Mary-Jean



Acknowledgement

We acknowledge the Traditional Owners of the lands we work within, the Bundjalung people (northern NSW), Wonnarua (Hunter Valley), Awabakal (Newcastle and Lake Macquarie), Biripi and Worimi (Taree/Manning Valley/Great Lakes) and many other Traditional Owner groups throughout New South Wales and Queensland. We pay respect to Aboriginal Elders past, present and future and acknowledge the privilege to work on country with Elders and families

Projects



Aspect to Woolumbin

Due Diligence Aboriginal Archaeological Assessment, Proposed Caravan Park, Tomewin Road, Dungay, NSW

Tweed Shire Council

In October 2016, Virtus Heritage undertook an Aboriginal heritage due diligence assessment on behalf of Coastplan Consulting for a proposed caravan park development at Tomewin Road, Dungay, north of Murwillumbah, NSW. Dr Mary-Jean Sutton conducted the field inspection, accompanied by Ernie Williams, a Cultural Heritage Officer from Tweed-Byron LALC.

Most of the project area is heavily modified from previous cropping and contouring, however the area adjacent to Grahams Creek, including the surrounding flats and terraces and a spur crest were considered to have low disturbance. These areas were also considered to have favourable conditions for Aboriginal occupation including fresh running water, native resource plants and aspect toward Wollumbin (Mt Warning); additionally, the project area is part of a broader cultural landscape of the Tweed Shire, which is steeped in cultural significance.

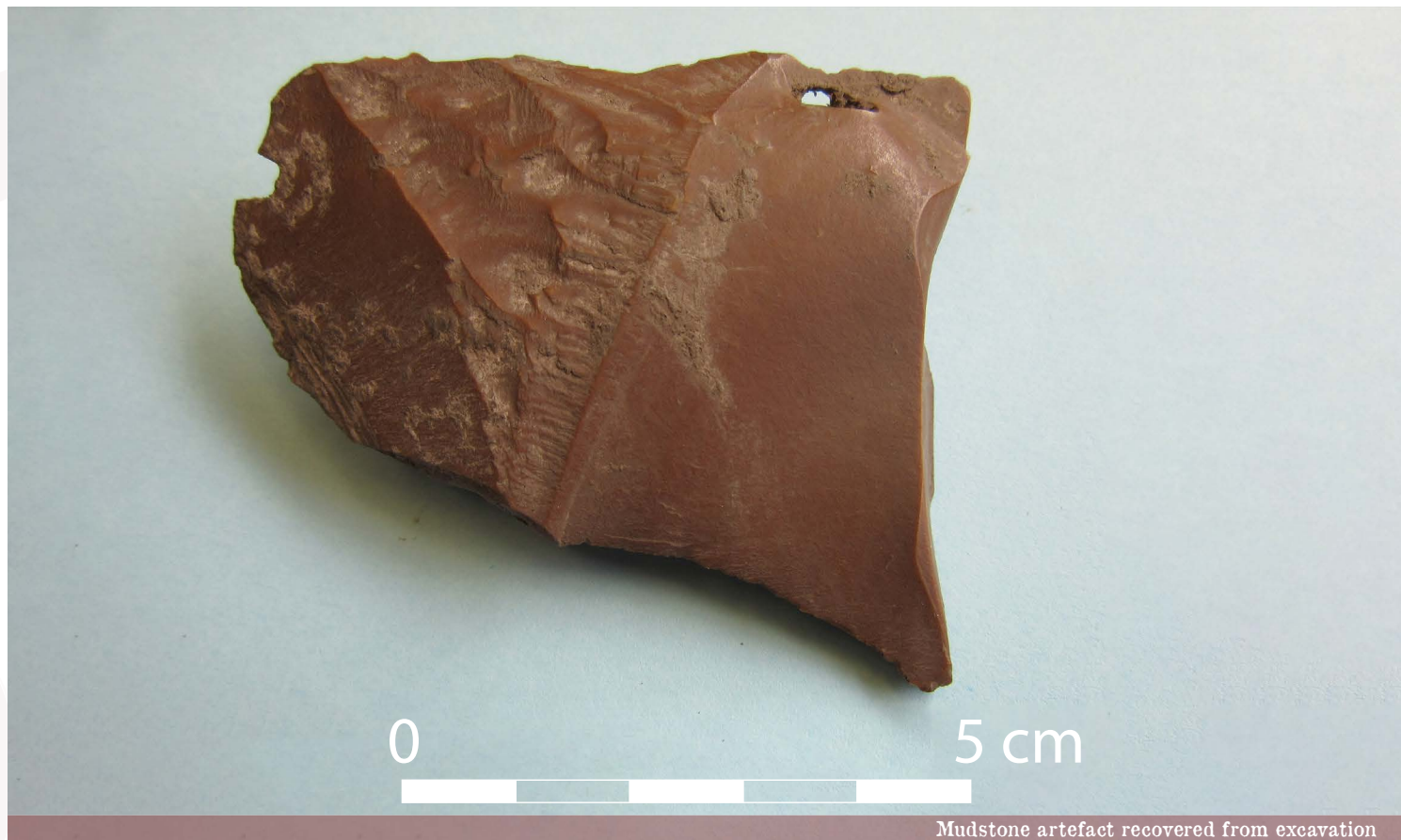
No registered Aboriginal heritage sites or places are known within the project area and no Aboriginal objects were identified during the site inspection, however visibility of the ground surface was very poor. Grahams Creek and associated flood banks and flats are considered to have moderate sensitivity for potential archaeological deposit (PAD) based on previous research and modelling of site distribution in the locality, however these areas will not be impacted by the proposal.



Grahams Creek



Small crest in survey area



Mudstone artefact recovered from excavation

Historical and Aboriginal Archaeological Test Excavations of Potential, Victoria Street, Belmont, NSW

GWH Build, NSW

Virtus Heritage was engaged by GWH Build to conduct archaeological excavations and investigations at Victoria Street, Belmont, NSW, a residential development that lies within the original Bahtabah Mission Land Grant. The Bahtabah Mission was established in 1826 by Rev. Lancelot Threlkeld and was one of the first Aboriginal Missions in NSW, thus any material remains related to the site would be considered to have State significance. Excavations were conducted to assess historical and Aboriginal archaeological potential, particularly contact period remains. Virtus Heritage worked alongside representatives from the Awabakal Descendant's Traditional Owners Aboriginal Corporation, Awabakal Traditional Owners Aboriginal Corporation, Bahtabah Local Aboriginal Land Council and Lower Hunter Aboriginal Incorporated.

Dr Peter Mitchell conducted a geomorphological assessment of the area and determined that the project area is part of a bedrock hill with relatively shallow soils, and the site had been significantly disturbed by 20th century housing construction. No material remains associated with the Bahtabah Aboriginal Mission were identified and most cultural material identified were mid to late 20th century bottles and ceramics.

Aboriginal occupation of the site was confirmed with the identification of 52 stone artefacts, predominantly flakes and broken

flakes of Nobby's/Merewether tuff, but also included a possible quartz pounder and tuff flake that was perforated. Dr Richard Fullagar (Centre of Archaeological Science, University of Wollongong) carried out specialist use-wear and residue analysis and concluded these perforations were natural not cultural modifications. There was no material evidence to indicate contact or cultural exchange between Aboriginal and European populations and investigations ruled out the project area as a possible location of the Bahtabah Mission. GWH Build has committed to a community memorial and interpretive garden to be developed in consultation with registered Aboriginal parties for reburial of the Aboriginal objects, in line with best heritage practice and ethical community consultation.



Two tuff artefacts recovered from excavations



Rockshelter identified during cultural heritage survey

Hollydeen Cultural Heritage Survey

Hunter Local Land Services

Dr Emma St Pierre carried out a survey of a Travelling Stock Reserve in the Upper Hunter for Hunter Local Land Services assisted by Mapoon Aboriginal Shire Council's Cultural Heritage Officer Jason Jia (engaged as a cultural exchange student through Virtus Heritage) and David Horton of the Wanaruah Local Aboriginal Land Council. Over 30 Aboriginal sites were recorded during this survey including potential scarred

trees, artefact scatters and several rock shelters with occupation deposit. One rock shelter contained thousands of stone tools and some potential worked mussel shell. We are working with HLLS and the Wonnarua Nation Aboriginal Corporation and Wanaruah Local Aboriginal Land Council to identify long term conservation of this culturally and scientifically site.

Due Diligence Training

Hunter Local Land Services - Scone and Taree

Christopher Jennings and Dr Mary-Jean Sutton carried out Due Diligence and Aboriginal archaeological awareness training for Hunter Local Land Services in Scone and Taree during July and August. This training included an overview of cultural heritage, NSW Office of Environment and Heritage due diligence requirements, stone tool identification and site recording training, including a rock shelter in the Upper Hunter Valley and an artefact scatter with PAD in Taree with hands on recording experience considering management of sensitive landscapes and Aboriginal occupation deposits.



Dr Sutton discussing the rockshelter site with HLLS employees



Rockshelter identified during cultural heritage study

Yarrabilba Cultural Heritage Study

Jabree Inc

In May 2017 Jabree Inc engaged Virtus to assist in the preparation of a Cultural Heritage Study of sandstone country in Yarrabilba, southeast Queensland comprising of Wickham National Park, Plunkett Conservation Area and old forestry lands. Previous cultural heritage assessments in the area had identified rock shelters in the sandstone escarpment including a significant rock shelter where hundreds of surface artefacts and subsurface materials were identified. The Cultural Heritage Study is one of only six ever undertaken in the state of

Queensland with the aim to identify further rock shelters that may be of archaeological and/or cultural significance. A field survey of the study area was conducted over eight days in collaboration with Jabree Cultural Heritage Field Officers and from this survey nine rock shelters were identified; however, these did not have any archaeological evidence associated with them. Six artefact scatters and 11 isolated finds were also identified during the survey contributing to our understanding of Aboriginal occupation of the area.



Rockshelter identified during cultural heritage study



Hand stencils at Peregian Reservoir

Kabbi Kabbi Hand Stencil Project

Unity Water

Unity Water engaged Virtus Heritage to undertake a specialist rock-art examination of three white hand stencils at Peregian Reservoir, Tea Tree Springs on the Sunshine Coast, Queensland. Portable X-Ray Fluorescence spectrometry (PXRF) can be used to determine the chemical composition of rock art pigments and in turn how, and in some instances when, rock-art was created. PXRF analysis determined that all hand stencils were made using a titanium dioxide pigment, almost certainly commercially produced white paint. Significantly this helped us assign a chronology, inferring that the rock art must have been produced after the European colonisation of Australia. The amount of titanium in the paint likely reflects a mid-twentieth century recipe (specifically ~1960) rather than a modern, 21st century paint. The manner in which the stencils

were made and their arrangement upon the sandstone boulder are consistent with Aboriginal rock art across the continent. Rather than 'second-hand copies' of Aboriginal art made by European Australians, we suggest that these stencils provide rare insight into the continuing cultural traditions of Indigenous peoples during the mid 1900s. This scientific investigation also enabled us to draw conclusions about the materiality of these hand stencils to predict short-medium term preservation and inform recommendations about ongoing site management. Dr Jillian Huntley has co-authored a publication on this work with other researchers including Mary-Jean on the results of this project, which is currently being reviewed for the International Journal of Archaeological Science.

Old Bar ACHA and AHIP

Coastplan Consulting

Bernadette Allen completed an Aboriginal cultural heritage assessment and Aboriginal Heritage Impact Permit application for an isolated find at Old Bar, NSW. This project was completed as one of several projects involving Coastplan Consulting, which our team is involved in this year, including a due diligence assessment for a proposed eco-park at Dungay, NSW, near Murwillumbah and a State Significant project at Allworth for a proposed quarry.



A view of the survey area at Old Bar

Services



Rock Art and Rock Shelter - Conservation and Management

Rock art in Australia generally takes the form of painted images using a variety of pigments, or petroglyphs - engraved or pecked images indented into soft rock. Rock shelters are caves or overhangs that have been used for occupation or other uses such as burials, caches or other activities. Australia has some of the oldest rock art in the world.

Virtus Heritage has extensive experience undertaking projects in rock art conservation and the identification of Aboriginal use

of rock shelters, their management and conservation. Our team's project experience includes preparation of cultural heritage studies for known significant rock shelters in Mt Tambourine, Queensland, geochemical and rock art conservation investigations of a rock shelter with hand stencils, in Peregrian Springs, Queensland, rock shelter surveys, planning and management plans for Aboriginal Cultural Heritage Offset Areas and Travelling Stock Routes, NSW and for other areas of NSW, including a large State land release area for housing in south west Sydney.

We have experienced team members that have supervised and assisted in archaeological investigations of rock shelters and caves and their deposits in World Heritage contexts, including in East Timor, Indonesia, Northern Territory and Western Australia. We work with other specialists including our technical affiliate Dr Jillian Huntley on specialised investigations to date and understand the materials used to make rock art and to date deposits within rock shelter deposits.





Technical affiliate: Dr Jillian Huntley (Geochemical and Rock Art Conservation investigations)

Jillian trained at the Australian National University under the mentorship of Alan Watchman, a pioneer in the scientific analysis of rock art. After more than a decade in commercial archaeology, she recently gained her PhD at the University of New England (2015). Her doctoral research focused on the use of field based spectrographic techniques to understand the materials used to make rock art, and the interactions between art panels and their environments. As part of her research Jillian collaborates with local and international colleagues, engages in remote area fieldwork (across the top-end of Australia and Indonesia) and conducts experiments at labs including the Australian Synchrotron and the Australian Centre for Microscopy and Microanalysis. In addition to her specialist skills, Jillian has a wealth of experience in archaeological survey, excavation, lithic analysis and Aboriginal stakeholder consultation. This rare blend of commercial and academic experience has helped Jillian to deliver client targeted outcomes to a high scientific standard <https://experts.griffith.edu.au/academic/j.huntley>



Jillian recently studied ochres from the excavation of the Madjedbebe rock shelter, as part of a multidisciplinary team investigating the earliest known site in Australia. <https://app.secure.griffith.edu.au/news/2017/07/21/ochres-reveal-colouring-of-colonisation/>

Noticeboard



Team Announcements

Bernadette Allen is now a permanent Senior Archaeologist with our team based in the Northern NSW office. Bernadette has been working with us casually on excavations since 2014.

Amanda Crick has joined us as a casual Archaeological Assistant in Newcastle. Amanda will be finalising her Honors degree in Archaeology at the University of New England.

Dr Emma St Pierre has returned from maternity leave as lead on ground-penetrating radar projects and to continue as Senior Archaeologist.

Rachael Mackay will now be working with Mary-Jean four days a week as a permanent Administrative Assistant. Rachael will be progressing our company's quality assurance certification and taking a greater role in the administration of Aboriginal consultation to agency requirements.

Chris Jennings has successfully completed confirmation of his PhD candidature at the University of Queensland in the School of Social Sciences.

Reconciliation Action Plan - is nearly finalised and will be online on our website later this year. Mapoon Traditional Owner Aunty Dianne Nicholls is creating an art design for our RAP to reflect our journey as a company since its inception in 2010 and to reflect our values and vision as collaborators with communities in cultural heritage. Some of the completed actions for our RAP this year have included opportunities for cultural heritage exchange with Mapoon Ranger, Jason Jia; collaboration with a Traditional Owner artist on a school children's t-shirt for cultural heritage; school children's ground-penetrating radar educational talks on cultural

heritage in Mapoon and employment of Aboriginal community members in grant projects.

Nina Kojovic has completed her honours thesis of the impacts of sand mining in northern NSW on cultural heritage sites in Anthropology at the University of Queensland under the supervision of Dr Sally Babidge. Her thesis is entitled *Sand Stories, Sand Dunes, Sand Mining: Aboriginal belonging, place and spiritual belief in Fingal* and incorporates the stories and reflections of 12 Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander residents from Fingal Head, in far northeastern New South Wales. Nina was introduced to the Tweed Byron Local Aboriginal Land Council members through a voluntary community research project at Fingal Cemetery facilitated by Virtus Heritage in 2015. After discussing issues of cultural heritage with Aboriginal residents, she became interested in the role of sand mining during the 1950s to 1970s and its impacts on burials and significant Aboriginal cultural sites. The thesis suggests, through anthropological analysis and interpretation, that this disruption has changed the relationship between people, their history, and the land. To understand living in place and sense of belonging among Aboriginal people, Nina consulted literature on the relationship between people, place, and space in Australian Aboriginal anthropology and historical documents and reports compiled by a local historian. Her thesis contributes to the way conceptions of place among Aboriginal people interact with constructions of country in Australian Aboriginal anthropology literature. We congratulate Nina on her hard work and are excited to announce upon culmination of her study she has been offered an internship with Native Title Services Victoria (NTSV), facilitated by the Aurora Education Fund. Nina has received first class Honours and is now a Graduate Anthropologist.

