



ACT Heritage Council

## Entry to the ACT Heritage Register

*Heritage Act 2004*

### 20114 Aboriginal Place – Majura Scarred Trees

Blocks (part) 596, 597, 598 and 599

**District of MAJURA**

This entry which was previously part of the old heritage places or the old heritage objects registers (as defined in the *Heritage Act 2004*), as the case may be, is taken to be registered under the *Heritage Act 2004*.

Conservation Requirements (including Specific Requirements), as defined under the *Heritage Act 2004*, that are contained within this document are taken to be Heritage Guidelines applying to this place or object, as the case may be.

Information restricted under *the old heritage places register or old heritage objects register* is restricted under the *Heritage Act 2004*.

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ACT Heritage Council

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**AUSTRALIAN CAPITAL TERRITORY  
INTERIM HERITAGE PLACES REGISTER**

This citation for has been prepared pursuant to ss.54(1) and 69(1)(a) of the *Land (Planning and Environment) Act 1991* in accordance the direction of the Minister for Arts and Heritage dated 2 December 1997 for the purposes of including the:

**ABORIGINAL PLACES, DISTRICT OF MAJURA (BLOCKS 596 part, 597, 598, 599)**

in an interim Heritage Places Register.

**Date of Gazettal            5 December 1997**

Enquiries about this place and copies of this citation are available from:

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## INTERIM HERITAGE PLACES REGISTER

### CITATION

#### ABORIGINAL PLACES, DISTRICT OF MAJURA (BLOCKS 596 part, 597, 598, 599)

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#### LOCATION OF PLACE:

Blocks 596 part, 597, 598 and 599, District of Majura.

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#### FEATURES INTRINSIC TO THE HERITAGE SIGNIFICANCE OF THE PLACE:

The features intrinsic to the heritage significance of the place are:

- four scarred trees;
  - two stone artefacts scatters; and
  - a single artefact.
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#### STATEMENT OF SIGNIFICANCE:

This place demonstrates an aspect of the Aboriginal way of life no longer practised. The presence of the artefact scatters and the scarred trees at Majura is evidence of the occupation and use of this place by Aboriginal people.

It is estimated from the age of the trees within the place and the character of their scar tissue that Aboriginal people scarred these trees more than 130 years ago. As such they are a rare example of scarring of trees after European occupation.

This place remains important to contemporary Aboriginal people, especially the Ngunnawal people.

These trees are valuable for research about past Aboriginal activities. The unusual existence of metal axe marks in the scars adds to the value of this place because of their rarity and the ability of the trees to act as benchmarks for further identification of features of this type.

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#### SPECIFIC REQUIREMENTS:

In accordance with s.54(1) of the *Land (Planning and Environment) Act 1991*, the following requirements are identified as essential to the conservation of the heritage significance of this place. These requirements are prepared to implement the following conservation policy for the place:

#### **The place is to be preserved in situ consistent with its heritage significance.**

Any action relating to these requirements is development for the purposes of the Act and will require approval prior to undertaking the activity. To undertake development without such approval may be an offence.

#### **1. Requirements Relating to the Trees**

- 1.1 Disturbance, excavation, and/or compaction of the ground area containing the root zone of the trees shall not be permitted.
- 1.2 Removal or felling of trees, other than in exceptional circumstances, including circumstances in which the trees are decayed or otherwise damaged and beyond economic tree surgery

repair, or where there is a significant safety reason to warrant removal, shall not be permitted. All prudent and feasible alternatives to removal or felling must be explored before removal or felling is considered.

- 1.3 Tree surgery or other activities which adversely affect the character of the tree or disturb scar(s) on the trees shall not be permitted.
- 1.4 Consultation with relevant Aboriginal organisations, under the meaning of the *Land (Planning and Environment) Act 1991*, is required as part of the approval of all development proposals relating to the trees.

## **2. Requirements Relating to the Artefact Scatters**

- 2.1 Sites S1 and S2: No action shall be permitted which would draw attention to their presence within the place.
  - 2.2 Single artefact. No disturbance of the artefact shall be permitted.
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### **MANAGEMENT RECOMMENDATIONS:**

In assessing this place for the interim Heritage Places Register, the Council recommends that the following actions and activities should be undertaken which will enhance the heritage values of the place. They are made as recommendations and have no legal effect.

1. A conservation and management plan for the long term conservation of the trees should be prepared in consultation with the ACT Heritage Council and relevant Aboriginal organisations.
2. Where any development on the land is approved, the following measures should be implemented as appropriate:
  - Protective fencing should be erected around the trunk of each of the scarred trees, to a radius extending at least 3m from the crown dripline (where the living and dead boughs reach their furthest extension).
  - The following activities should not occur within fenced areas:
    - \* use or storage of machinery and vehicles;
    - \* dumping or storage of fill, waste, oil, fuel, or other liquids;
    - \* construction of temporary or permanent structures earthworks; and
    - \* cement or brick paving.
  - Leaf litter and other combustible material surrounding the trees should be removed to minimise the risk of fire damage. Grass control could be managed by strategic design of fencing to allow small grazing animals access to grass within the fences.
  - Mistletoe growth on trees should be manually removed by specialists.
  - Insect infestation and subterranean termite attacks on the trees should be treated professionally. A tree specialist should be employed to restore unhealthy trees to a more vigorous state by pruning or improving soil fertility. Trees should not be treated without consultation by an expert. Improper tree surgery or soil fertilisation can easily shock native trees, often resulting in death to the tree.
  - Trees should be regularly inspected in relation to their condition and vigour.
  - Flow of irrigation water should be directed around the trees to minimise the effects of chemicals, organics and increased moisture which may be detrimental to the trees' health.
  - Any persons working in the area should be made aware of on site cultural resources and strongly encouraged to treat the resources with sensitivity.

### **Management of the Artefact Scatters**

1. Site S1 has been impacted by livestock and humans and is located in an exposure along a fenceline. The best conservation for this site would be to leave the site in situ without undertaking any fencing, signage or other activities which would draw attention to its presence.
  2. Site S2 , although disturbed, may contain extensive subsurface deposits. The area of the site should be tested for deposits prior to any development activities. Should the site possess a developed structure, mitigation of the site may be necessary for development to proceed. This may involve archaeological excavation or site avoidance. It is recommended that a 10m diameter barrier be constructed around the site if any development, which impacts on the site, is approved for the place. This barrier should not have any conspicuous information alerting collectors or vandals to the presence of archaeological deposits.
  3. The isolated artefact, a grey silcrete flake found in an intermittent creek bed, represents normal background scatter and is best left in situ.
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### **DOCUMENT HISTORY**

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| 2 December 1997 | Minister directed the ACT Heritage Council to enter the Place in an interim Heritage Places Register under section 69(1)(a) of the ( <i>Land Planning and Environment) Act 1991</i> . |
| 5 December 1997 | Place gazetted to the interim Heritage Places Register.   |

## BACKGROUND INFORMATION

### 1. DESCRIPTION OF PLACE

The sites are located on Blocks 597, 598 and 599, Majura ACT. The precise location of these sites is not included in this document for conservation reasons. The area is approximately 60 hectares of mostly degraded Broadacre<sup>1</sup> land, within the former Abattoir Holding Paddocks north of Oaks Estate, ACT. The area is bounded by Piallago Avenue to the north and the Molonglo river to the east, south and west. The sites in this area comprise:

- four scarred trees;
- two artefact scatters; and
- a single artefact.

#### Tree 1:

This is a living, mature, Yellow box (*Eucalyptus melliodora*) which is in a poor condition due to soil degradation, bark mutilation, borer beetle attack and termite infestation. The tree scar exhibits marks made from a metal axe, indicating Aboriginal activity during the period of European settlement.

#### Tree 2:

Tree 2 is a living, mature, Blakely's red gum (*Eucalyptus blakelyi*) in excellent health and appears only to be suffering from minor insect infestation. This tree also has some rare features including the shape of the scar and the random markings from a metal axe across the scar surface. In the callus, there are three clusters of rusted spikes and two machine made nails on the left hand side of the scar. This also indicates Aboriginal activity during the period of European settlement.

#### Tree 3:

This tree is a living, mature, Blakely's red gum in moderate health although it has suffered severe termite infestation. It has metal axe marks and is part of the stand of trees which are the only recorded grouping of Aboriginal scarred trees from the period of European settlement in the ACT.

#### Tree 4:

Tree 4 is a living, mature, Yellow box in moderate health suffering from minor insect infestation. This tree has one unique characteristic it is the only known Yellow box in the ACT with multiple Aboriginal scarring. One of the scars is on the south- south west side and the other on the north side with four pairs of machine made nails located on both sides of the south-southwest scar. These nails are not related to the scarring.

#### Site 1:

This is a surface deposit of stone flakes and tools scattered over 4m<sup>2</sup> and includes:

- 1 buff coloured cortical flake, with cortex weathered by surface exposure;
- 2 pink and white quartzite cortical flakes originating from a river cobble;
- 1 multi-platform/multi-directional core of pink and white quartzite; and
- 1 black chert scraper.

<sup>1</sup> As defined by policy B10 of the Territory Plan.

## Site 2:

This is a surface deposit of stone flakes and tools scattered over 4m<sup>2</sup> in a sandy exposure and includes:

- 1 pale green coloured, meta-sedimentary, multi-platform/multi-directional core;
- 1 small pink quartz primary with cortex indicating a riverine origin;
- 1 small pink quartzite secondary flake (no cortex);
- 1 grey silcrete secondary flake (no cortex); and
- 1 opaque quartz secondary flake (no cortex).

This is a soft, silty-sand deposit which could be up to 2 metres in depth. This deposit is overlooking an extensive sand quarry and has been disturbed by rabbits.

## Single Artefact:

This is a grey silcrete secondary flake found in the intermittent creek in the place.

## 2. STATUS OF PLACE AT NOMINATION DATE:

Not entered in any statutory register.

## 3. BACKGROUND:

Scarring on trees is caused by a range of natural and human causes. Aborigines stripped bark to make shelters, coolamons, shields, and canoes. This resulted in artificial, permanent scarring of trees. In the ACT, Ngunnawal Aboriginal people were scarring trees until the 1850s and 1860s.

Scarred trees have been reported throughout the ACT, such as on Harcourt Hill near Nicholls (Officer 1994) and Wanniasa, and individual trees have been recorded in Belconnen, Gungahlin, Garran, Gilmore, and Kambah. The most widely publicised scarred tree in the ACT is the "Lanyon Canoe Tree" on the Lanyon Homestead near Tharwa (Flood 1996).

The current distribution of scarred trees in the ACT is related to nineteenth and twentieth century European land use. 60-70% of trees in the Canberra region have been cleared to provide for stock grazing and timber. These practices began early in the nineteenth century (Boden in Officer 1994). The construction of roads and suburbs as Canberra developed further reduced the number of scarred trees. Those which have been identified are largely within urban areas where little development has occurred, such as school playgrounds, parks and nature reserves.

## 4. CONSULTATION

Consultation with the relevant Aboriginal organisations representing the Ngunnawal people<sup>2</sup>, was undertaken in preparation of this interim Register. A summary of their comments follows:

### the Ngunawal ACT & District Aboriginal Council of Elders:

*"... I believe that all efforts should be made to conserve the listed items as there is little archaeological evidence that this area was occupied by Aboriginal people ... To be able to provide evidence of that occupation and the day to day practices of Aboriginal people at that time seems vitally important. ..."*  
(Mr Wally Bell).

### Ngunnawal ACT & District Indigenous Peoples Association:

This group agreed with the body of the report on the importance of the significance of the Aboriginal sites at Majura to all Aboriginal people.

### Ngunnawal Elders Council Incorporated:

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<sup>2</sup> Under ss.68(2)(b) and 69(1)(b) of the *Land (Planning and Environment) Act 1991*

This group was contacted but no response was received.

As required under the Act, consultation was also undertaken with the person who reported the places, Mr Kyle Moffitt, who endorsed the Council's recommendations.

The Act further required consultation with relevant lessees and/or occupiers. As the land on which the places are located is unleased Territory Land, there are no lessees. Consultation was also undertaken with other interested parties and no objections raised to this interim Register.

**5. ANALYSIS AGAINST THE CRITERIA SPECIFIED IN SCHEDULE 2 OF THE LAND (PLANNING AND ENVIRONMENT) ACT 1991:**

**Criteria (iii) A place which demonstrates a distinctive way of life, taste, tradition, religion, land use, custom, process, design or function which is no longer practised, is in danger or being lost, or is of exceptional interest**

This site demonstrates an aspect of the Aboriginal way of life practised in the past but no longer practised. The presence of the scarred trees provides substantial, tangible and highly visible evidence for Aboriginal activity during the past.

**Criteria (iv) A place which is highly valued by the community or a cultural group for reasons of strong or special religious, spiritual, cultural, educational or social associations**

All remaining Aboriginal sites are significant to the Aboriginal community. These sites are particularly evocative of a tangible link with the past. The site has special educational potential, as a set of scarred trees in a discrete area. Those which exhibit axe marks are particularly important as dating from the time of early European contact in Australia. The Ngunnawal people have expressed their concerns that the surviving remnant of their culture should be protected and it is vitally important to ensure that all possible actions are taken to ensure this request is followed.

**Criteria (vi) A place which is a notable example of a class of natural or cultural places or landscapes and which demonstrates the principal characteristics of that class**

Aboriginal scarred trees area rare site type in the ACT. The presence of the metal axe marks associated with the scars is unique in the ACT.

**Criteria (vii) A place which has strong or special associations with a person, group, event, development or cultural phase which played a significant part in local or national history.**

The site is associated with a significant cultural phase in the history of the ACT and Australia which ended soon after the coming of Europeans.



**6. REFERENCES:**

1. Flood, J. 1995. *The Riches of Ancient Australia*. University of Queensland Press: St. Lucia.
2. Moffitt, K. 1997. *A Cultural Resource Survey of Blocks 597, 598 and 599 Majura, ACT*. Report prepared for the Department of Urban Services.
3. Officer, K. 1994. *A Conservation and Management Plan for the Harcourt Hill Scarred Trees: GAR2, GAR3, GAR4 and GAR5, Nicholls, ACT*. Unpublished report to ACTEW.