



ACT Heritage Council

BACKGROUND INFORMATION YEDDUNG DHAURA (BLOCK 1 SECTION 111, FORDE)

At its meeting of 16 September the ACT Heritage Council decided that Yeddung Dhaura was eligible for inclusion on the ACT Heritage Register.

The information contained in this report was considered by the ACT Heritage Council in assessing the nomination for Yeddung Dhaura, formerly known as Bonner Potential Archaeological Deposit 1 (BPAD1), against the heritage significance criteria outlined in s10 of the *Heritage Act 2004*.

HISTORY

Yeddung Dhaura is an Aboriginal campsite located on a flat-topped rise on the eastern edge of a tributary stream of Ginninderra Creek. It is a high-density archaeological deposit that probably accumulated through multiple occupational events that occurred within the last 3000 years (NOHC 2011a). The *in situ* preservation of material artefacts in the landscape is of particular significance to the Aboriginal community because of the link these provide to the lifeways of their ancestors before disruption due to colonisation.

Archaeological assessment

The location was originally identified as a potential archaeological deposit (PAD) by archaeological consultants during the cultural impact assessments for the suburb of Bonner (AASC 2004). When direct development impacts were proposed to the site from the development of water quality control ponds archaeological investigations (Stage 1) were undertaken (NOHC 2005). Later the plans were amended requiring further archaeological investigations and salvage (Stage 2) (NOHC 2010, 2011a). These investigations established the site as a relatively high-density deposit compared to similar sites in the ACT.

In total there were 54 test-pits excavated containing 536 artefacts (NOHC 2005, 2011a).¹ The areal incidence (a/m^2)² of artefact distribution varied across the site with the highest concentration of artefacts being 252 per a/m^2 . The mean artefact numbers across the 54 test-pits was 39.7 per a/m^2 . Low artefact densities on the northern, eastern and southern margins of the site are evidence for the fact that Yeddung Dhaura is the location of a distinct activity area, focused on the level ground of the central terrace with proximity to the stream. This location was returned to on multiple occasions over time as evidenced by the uneven distribution of concentrations across the site that suggests a palimpsest of discrete depositional events.

The lithic technology represented in the Yeddung Dhaura assemblage includes flakes, flaked pieces and debitage flakes (NOHC 2011a). There are few formal tools or retouched implements in the assemblage. The flaking technology was focused on locally available materials and small flakes were the most common artefacts. Stone knapping and microlith production was taking place at Yeddung Dhaura, but there is little evidence for tool use and discard.

Gungahlin Aboriginal Cultural Landscape

Aboriginal people are known to have inhabited the Canberra region for the past 25,000 years. The oldest evidence for human activity within the region is from Birragai Rockshelter in the foothills of the Namadgi Ranges (Flood, et al. 1987,

¹ Additional artefacts were collected during surface collection, and salvage from works areas.

² The areal incidence is a conflation of the artefact numbers from all depths. Because there is very little vertical integrity in these archaeological sites the areal incidence best reflects the distribution of activities with the sites. The test-pit sizes often vary so the figures are extrapolated from the excavated totals to give an estimate per square metre that can be used for comparisons of density between different areas of a site or with different sites.

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Theden-Ringl 2016). The Aboriginal people of the Canberra region most likely lived in small groups with occasional larger gatherings taking place for ceremonial purposes and resource gathering (Flood 1980). Although the presence of Aboriginal people in the region extends back 25,000 years, the artefact assemblages that bear material witness to their presence in the landscape are not the same over the entire period. Changes to the artefact types are evident over time so, although there is no stratigraphic change evident in the archaeological deposits at Yeddung Dhaura, the microlithic nature of the assemblage (including knapping debris, backed flakes and blades) is characteristic of assemblages that accumulated in the last 3000 years in southern New South Wales and the Australian Capital Territory (NOHC 2011a).

Material artefacts remaining in the landscape have a special association for the Aboriginal community because of the evidentiary link these provide to the lifeways of their ancestors before disruption due to colonisation. Negative impacts, both direct and indirect, on the Aboriginal populations after colonisation were immense.³ The Aboriginal populations were decimated by disease in the 19th century. Loss of access to traditional resources, due to sectioning of the land, exacerbated the population decline and lifestyle losses. In the early 20th century, many of the remaining people were forced to live on reserves, the most significant being those at Yass, Tumut and Cowra. However, Aboriginal people descended from those inhabiting the region at colonisation continued to live in the area and it is these peoples who attest to the cultural heritage values of Yeddung Dhaura.

Although cultural information relating to the specific location of Yeddung Dhaura did not live on in the cultural memory, the activities in the general location were well known, as well as the utilisation of Ginninderra Creek as a cultural corridor.

The pathway follows Ginninderra Creek... the pathway was used all times of the year, different plants and fruits around at different times of the year. That's a frequently used pathway as well. And there's other significant places along the Ginninderra Creekline, closer up to the headwaters you've got the ochre sites as well (Wally Bell in Waters 2017, p82).

This quote was presented in conversation regarding a corroboree ground next to the suburb of Macgregor West, further downstream, but also refers to the activities at the headwaters of the creek in the vicinity of Yeddung Dhaura. After the location of the campsite at Yeddung Dhaura was confirmed through archaeological excavation, the Aboriginal community strongly advocated for its preservation and a return to country of the artefacts that were excavated during the evaluation process. Therefore, it is clear that Yeddung Dhaura represents an aspect of the past that contributes to the identity of Aboriginal people living in the Canberra region today.

Individual places, such as Yeddung Dhaura, do not just bear testament to the past lifeways of the Aboriginal people on their own but, together with other sites in the region, can also be considered within the broader cultural landscape. As mentioned previously, stone artefacts are the most tangible link to the past lifeways of Aboriginal people, because of their durability. The stone that is found in the landscape was predominantly collected in the local region.

Although sourcing studies have not been done to establish the exact locations where the stone at Yeddung Dhaura came from there are a number of known stone sources in Gungahlin and the surrounding areas. The closest stone source to Yeddung Dhaura is the Mulligan's Flat Quarry, which is within sight on a ridge about 1.3 km away (Barber and Williams 1998, ACT Heritage Council 2019). Loose blocks of stone can be found scattered across the ground, these could be easily collected and used as cores for flaking stone pieces. One outcrop of rock also showed evidence for direct utilisation. Further afield, there is another probable stone source that was located just over the current ACT/NSW border on a property called 'Reidsdale'. Gillespie undertook investigations at the property and describes it as the largest site in close proximity to Canberra city containing over 7000 artefacts including axes, choppers, scrapers, points, blades, cores, and hammerstones (Gillespie 1979, 1984, 1992). Other stone sources within Gungahlin are located at sites C1/2, C1/3, C1/4 (approx. 4.3 km away) (Heffernan and Klaver 1995). These are surficial stone deposits with cultural activity evidenced by the presence of distinctive conchoidal fractures on larger blocks of the raw material. There was also hammerstones, as well as flake debitage which provided evidence of further reduction at the sites. Another cluster of stone sources is found at PH12 and PH13 (approx. 4.6 km away) (Kuskie 1992). PH12 is on a rocky knoll and evidenced by negative flake scars on the rock surfaces. PH13 which is located on the opposite side of the valley, across the tributary creek, is a rocky out crop with fewer negative flake scars but a larger number of artefacts. These stone sources sites show that basic raw materials were readily available in the local region. The analysis of the assemblage from Yeddung Dhaura concluded that the activities at the site were focused on locally

³ See Waters 2017 for a relatively recent summary of impacts to the Aboriginal community in the Canberra region caused by European settlement.

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available materials (NOHC 2011a). It is hard to draw many conclusions regarding local Aboriginal life ways from this fact, but it makes an interesting contrast to the Reidsdale assemblage, located only a few kilometres away, where Gillespie (1984) identified a much more diverse representation of raw materials in the assemblage coming from further afield.

In the aforementioned quote by Wally Bell that discussed the pathway along the Gungahlin Creek he mentions the ochre quarries close to the headwaters. Ochre was a highly valued resource in Aboriginal culture and would have been exchanged and traded. Therefore the proximity of this site to at least three known ochre quarries suggests that this was an area which would have had relatively high levels of cultural activity. The closest ochre source to Yeddung Dhaura is that at 'Reidsdale' (Flood 1980, Gillespie 1979, 1984). Another ochre source, also located in NSW, is Derrawa Dhaura (formerly known as Gollion Ochre Quarry) located about 5.8 km away (NSW Government 2018). It is a source for rare yellow, red and purple ochre. Although both the aforementioned sites are located over the border, movement through the gap in the hills just north of Yeddung Dhaura would have been an obvious route into the Canberra region, linking to the Ginninderra Creek pathway, and ultimately the Murrumbidgee River songline described by Bell (in Waters 2017). Another source of ochre is located at Gubur Dhaura, which is about 3.5 km away. This place, located on a low ironstone ridgeline in Franklin, was a campsite and probably utilised to collect red and yellow ochre which could be readily accessed in outcrops near the surface (NOHC 2003).

Other evidence of Aboriginal cultural activity in the Gungahlin area includes a small number of grinding grooves in rocks at Percival Hill (about 6.4 km away) (Winston-Gregson 1986) and scarred trees that are recorded in Crace (BIOSIS 2010).

Comparative assessment of assemblage density

Stone artefacts are the most durable remains of Aboriginal campsites. There are many stone artefact scatters in the ACT, however few intact sites are of a comparable size to Yeddung Dhaura.

The highest densities of artefacts in the Canberra region would probably have been located on rises above the Molonglo River at Black Mountain and Piallago. This is evidenced by historical accounts from early European settlers in the region and reports of artefacts collected in the past. W. P. Bluett (1954) describes two groups of Aboriginal people in the Canberra District, one that camped at Piallago who he refers to as the 'Piallago Blacks' and one who camped at Black's Mountain who he called the 'Canburry or Nganbra Blacks.' He later refers to these collectively as the Nganbra-Piallago tribe. While both locations hosted corroborees he states that Canburry Creek (Sullivan's Creek at the base of Black Mountain) was the location of the whole-tribe gatherings, while Piallago was the location of "frequent local social gatherings." Gillespie (1984) believes Black Mountain Peninsula was the location where George Augustus Robinson, Chief Protector of Aborigines, visited an Aboriginal campsite in 1844 and also mentions the recollection of Sarah Rolfe that corroborees were still taking place near Black Mountain when her family arrived in 1849. William Davis Wright (1923), who was born in the region in 1841 and grew up alongside many local Aboriginal children, noted that corroboree grounds were located at Acton and near 'Canberra Church' near the Duntroon dairy, which may correspond to the aforementioned areas at the base of Black Mountain and Piallago described by Bluett.

The high levels of Aboriginal activity at Piallago and Black Mountain probably corresponded with high or very high concentrations of artefacts relating to Aboriginal occupation. However, they were particularly prone to disturbance by early settler activities, collectors, and the subsequent development of Canberra city infrastructure. The high concentrations of artefacts relating to activities of the Aboriginal communities at Piallago was well-known and subjected to numerous collections over time, albeit in deposits that were heavily disturbed by agriculture (Gillespie 1984, Saunders 1989). Saunders (1989) reports on 12,856 artefacts from three assemblages at Piallago, all located in the former dune complex on the northern and eastern sides of the Molonglo River, but these were from disturbed contexts and found over a very wide area so an accurate assessment of artefact density is impossible. Artefacts which would have been located at the Black Mountain Peninsula were also subjected to major disturbance. For instance, Gillespie (1984) mentions instances of earlier collectors and records collecting over 500 artefacts on the Black Mountain Peninsula himself. Because there are no systematic records of these sites it is almost impossible to gauge what the concentration of artefacts would have been for comparison with more recent archaeological studies.

It seems reasonable to assume based on the records available that the focus of large gatherings in the Canberra region was on the rises of the Molonglo at Piallago and Black Mountain, so the highest concentrations of artefacts would probably have been in those locations. It is reported that apart from at the time of the big corroborees the larger 'tribes' split into smaller groups. Wright (1923) stated that at the time of European settlement the 'Kamberra tribe'

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numbered between 400 and 500 individuals, and met once a year for a big corroboree (most likely on the rises of the Molonglo River at Black Mountain), otherwise living in smaller groups of 20 to 30. Bluett (1927) also described a similar pattern of settlement with groups of 20-30 people camping at different sites throughout the region. It might then be expected that the areas of the ACT, away from Piallago and Black Mountain, may have concentrations of artefacts where these smaller camps occurred but probably not as high as the aforementioned sites.

Although, as already discussed, it is hard to compare concentrations in other areas to those at Black Mountain and Piallago it is probable that the 'high density' concentrations found elsewhere correspond to regular campsites along pathways away from the main meeting area. In recent years more systematic recording of stone artefact scatters and sometimes archaeological investigations have been conducted in many parts of Canberra. In theory, these provide a clearer baseline for comparison of the relative concentration of artefacts at Yeddung Dhaura. However, differences in sampling strategy and excavation methodology greatly complicate any inter-site comparisons. For instance, sites HID1391 and HID1395 in Hume were described as dense, diverse and rich assemblages (Huonbrook 2007). However, the grader scrape methodology used is not comparable in terms of artefact numbers and densities to the test-pitting methodologies used elsewhere.⁴

Only two localities, other than Yeddung Dhaura, have excavated assemblages of a comparable size (Table 1). These are Macgregor West and several locations within Hume. All are located on elevated ground above watercourses. This is compatible with the analysis of several archaeologists in the Gungahlin area (NOHC 1992, Wood and Paton 1993, Huys 1993 in Williams and Barber 1995), as well as the findings of Flood (1980) over the broader region, who observed that Aboriginal campsites would most often be found on low-gradient, elevated ground near water courses. Furthermore, larger sites tend to be found close to water, whereas smaller sites were more randomly distributed across the landscape.

Comparisons between the stone artefact assemblages are complicated by the size of the excavated area. For instance, if areas outside the main assemblage concentration are sampled in trying to establish the extent of the site this can skew the mean areal incidence. Conversely, test-pitting a location may not reveal the true extent of the assemblage. Therefore, we should limit direct comparisons. That said, it is possible to argue that these were all relatively high-density campsites compared to the size of other stone artefact scatters found in the ACT region (Table 1). These sites are located on the established pathways that the Aboriginal people would have followed when moving through the landscape in the past. Yeddung Dhaura clearly fits into these sites based on its high numbers of artefacts. However, it should be noted that the artefacts found at Yeddung Dhaura are made from a smaller range of stone types and stone artefact technologies compared to other sites of Aboriginal activity, such as MW5. This may represent different reasons for and conditions in utilising the Yeddung Dhaura campsite, such as a focus on the collection and processing of nearby stone outcrops as compared to other places where the stone artefact assemblage accumulates through the discard of stone from multiple sources as the Aboriginal people move along pathways further from the collection locations.

Table 1: Comparison of excavated high-density assemblages in the ACT

Site name	Location	Total number of excavated artefacts	Highest areal incidence (a/m ²) ⁵	Mean areal incidence (a/m ²)	Source
Yeddung Dhaura	Forde	536	252	39.7	NOHC 2011a
MW5	Macgregor West	1370	120	28.6	NOHC 2009
HID1395	Hume	142	-	35	AASC & CHMA 2008a
		924	70	37	AASC & CHMA 2008b
HAC2	Hume	223	-	56	AASC & CHMA 2008a
HA 12	Hume	321	-	80	AASC & CHMA 2008a
		463	43	18.5	AASC & CHMA 2008b
HA1/PAD 1	Hume	184	114	46	CHMA 2008
HA1/PAD2	Hume	143	102	35.8	CHMA 2008
PAD 6C, Pit 51	Hume	896	127	14.5	NOHC 2016

⁴ That said, subsequent investigations at HID 1395 are reported below.

⁵ It should be noted that the highest and mean areal incidence is often extrapolated from collection within a smaller sample area, such as a 50cm test-pit.

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The campsite at Yeddung Dhaura is the largest known concentration of stone artefacts in the Gungahlin area and one of the highest in the Canberra Region. Low density scatters of stone artefacts and isolated finds are common in the landscape. However, the high concentrations of artefacts are testament to a comparatively high level of cultural activity at Yeddung Dhaura. This was not just an incidental site created by a single deposition event, but a location to which Aboriginal peoples returned on multiple occasions. The location at Yeddung Dhaura provides proximity to water, movements pathways and views to surrounding ridgelines, as well as more distant locations such as Tidbinbilla and the Gibraltar Ranges.

Preservation and Re-naming of the Place

After archaeological investigations revealed the extent of the stone artefact assemblage at Yeddung Dhaura, negotiations with the Representative Aboriginal Organisations (RAOs) led to a decision to minimise the impacts and thereby preserve the areas containing the highest density of artefacts undisturbed (NOHC 2011b, NOHC 2012a). A Return to Country of all artefacts salvaged from the surface and uncovered during the archaeological investigations was undertaken (NOHC 2012b, NOHC 2012c). These artefacts were reburied in recorded locations in direct contact with the soil.

This place has been given the name Yeddung Dhaura. During the archaeological assessment process the place was known as Bonner Potential Archaeological Deposit 1, often shortened to BPAD1. The potential for an archaeological site was first identified in the cultural heritage assessment for Bonner, but ultimately the location was included within the suburb of Forde. Subsequent archaeological investigations also revealed material evidence that this was a place of Aboriginal activity, hence a new name was chosen to acknowledge the Aboriginal cultural significance of the place. The name 'Yeddung Dhaura' translates to mean 'Good Ground.' The words have common roots in the related languages used by groups who interacted in this region, including the Ngunnawal, Ngambri, Walgalu, and Ngarigu.

DESCRIPTION

Physical condition and integrity

The conservation zone preserved 40% (2514 m²) of the known archaeological deposit *in situ*, including 86% of the deposit with greater than the average artefact incidence (NOHC 2012a). Furthermore, all portions of the deposit with detected artefact incidences of greater than 100a/m² are within this conservation area. Geofabric was placed over the deposits within the conservation zone and excavated fill from the ponds was placed on top of this to provide protection to the deposits.

The conservation area is located within urban open space, the exact location of the deposits is not publicly identified but the surrounding area was given the name Ngunnawal Country Park. Therefore, the boundary of the site is defined by the extent of the surrounding park area (Image 1). Signage relevant to the Aboriginal history of the area and the site excavations have been included in this space by the developers and also as part of the Canberra Tracks program.

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SITE PLAN



Image 1 Yeddung Dhaura site boundary

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