

My Field School Experience

MICHELE PAYNE | FORMER NATIONAL TRUST OF AUSTRALIA (WA) COUNCILLOR

I am an occasional trawler of the Trust's website to check out events and activities that the Trust offers in addition to those reported in the Trust News. Given my unease with the apparent difficulties of protecting rock art on the Burrup, and a concern that we need to develop broader conceptions of heritage appreciation and management that are less compartmentalised or too discipline-specific, my interest was piqued in mid 2008 by the appearance on the Trust's Natural Heritage website of an invitation to participate in an "Applied Heritage Management Field School" under the auspices of the Gabbie Kylie Foundation.

Most importantly, the invitation made it clear that lack of experience in matters archaeological, (about which I knew nothing) was no impediment to participation. Acting under the optimistic hope that my real life workload might lighten over summer, I opted to come along on the four-week trip, starting shortly after New Year, with the broad goal of learning more about the South West, and getting a sense of how to integrate Aboriginal heritage into natural heritage/natural landscape protection.

After meeting up with participants with a diverse range of ages, skills and experience, under the guidance of trip coordinator David Guilfoyle, and having been fortified with a Welcome to Country by Uncle Ken Hayward and Aunty Josie Boyle, we toured the Western Australian Museum in the Perth, Welshpool and Fremantle (Maritime) premises and were provided with explanations from museum archaeology, anthropology, ethnology and photography specialists.

Basic archaeological skills (how to dig a hole and record what comes out of it scientifically) were learned at the Clarence/Peel Town site south of Fremantle, over a period of several days. We then ventured to Manjimup to gather data for two weeks on a property which featured an extensive flake scatter that had been uncovered by the owner when regrading an airstrip.

Joined by archaeology students from University of Western Australian under the guidance of academic and research staff, as well as Traditional Owners from the region and the property owners, we explored and discovered daily. More information gathering techniques (surveying, flake and tool identification, weed management, landscape geomorphology and general recognition of various soil and geological features) were learned in the process of compiling data about the property.

When fully analysed in future field schools, the data will inform a management plan for the property owners, as well as making more complete the record of the nature and extent of Aboriginal use and occupation of that region.

This build up of skills was also designed to prepare us for the final phase of the trip – further investigation of the cultural features of the landscape of various islands in the Recherche Archipelago. This part of the trip involved a more direct and intimate taste of historic experience, living aboard the *STS Leeuwin* for five days.

We had been joined in Esperance by Traditional Owners from that region as well as additional professionals and academics – all teachers with much local knowledge. We had an incredibly stimulating time bush bashing through areas burned and thus newly accessible, looking at wreck sites, old ruins of whaling and sealing activities from the early 19th century, unusual geological features, plants and animals, listening to traditional stories associated with places, and endlessly, with eyes on the ground.

The multi-disciplinary nature of the activities underpinned a thrilling experience which involved new skills, and an ability to think in more articulate ways about what it means to love the WA landscape. I'll never look at the ground in quite the same way again. May there be many more Field Schools to come with lots of Trust member participation.

This project was made possible through funding from the Australian Government's Indigenous Heritage Program, BHP Billiton, the University of Western Australia, South Coast NRM Inc and the Blackwood Basin Group. It was also supported by the WA Museum, Curtin University, the Department of Environment and Conservation and the Department of Indigenous Affairs.

ABOVE TOP TO BOTTOM | Artefacts exposed by tree roots on Middle Island. National Trust (WA)

L-R Michele Payne, Sandra Rato, Viv Karahoutis, Lucie Amami, Laetitia Laquay and Dr Shane Burke. D Guilfoyle

Test excavations at the large archaeological site at Kin Kin. D Guilfoyle

Laura Colman finds remnants of a bottle during her visit to the Bay of Isles. D Guilfoyle

