

REPORT ON  
HISTORICAL ARCHAEOLOGICAL EXPEDITION  
TO MIDDLE AND BOXER ISLANDS,  
RECHERCHE ARCHIPELAGO,  
WESTERN AUSTRALIA  
16-25 APRIL 2006



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Report to DEC (formally CALM), Heritage Council of WA,  
DIA, UWA WA Museum, Esperance Museum

Report—Department of Maritime Archaeology,  
Western Australian Museum No. 222.

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- Corioli Souter, Curator, Department of Maritime Archaeology, Western Australian Museum
- Ron (Doc) Reynolds, Traditional Owner, Esperance
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### *Permits*

This research was carried out with permits from DEC (formally CALM) for the collection of archaeological samples from historical sites from islands within the Recherche Archipelago (Permit CEO01265) and a permit from DIA to collect archaeological samples (Section 16 Permit, March 2006, Permit No 408). The sites are located in the Recherche Archipelago Nature Reserve, Reserve No A 22796, which is vested in the Conservation Commission of Western Australia and managed on their behalf by the Department of Environment and Conservation (DEC), formerly known as the Department of Conservation and Land Management (CALM). The Heritage Council was

consulted, and supported the research (Ian Baxter, Director Heritage Council, letter, P5051/P14991/82316).

## Introduction

Following the discovery of archaeological sites of nineteenth century sealers and whalers in the Recherche Archipelago this expedition aimed to record and excavate two sites on Boxer and Middle islands, with the material to be analysed by the UWA and WA Museum staff and UWA students. Immediate aims were: (1) new knowledge of these significant historical sites and past industries; and (2) comparison with similar sites in eastern Australia. This pilot study aimed to assist the development of the research design for an ARC Linkage application to explore the archaeological evidence for historical use of islands, coast and waterways on Western Australia's southern coast.

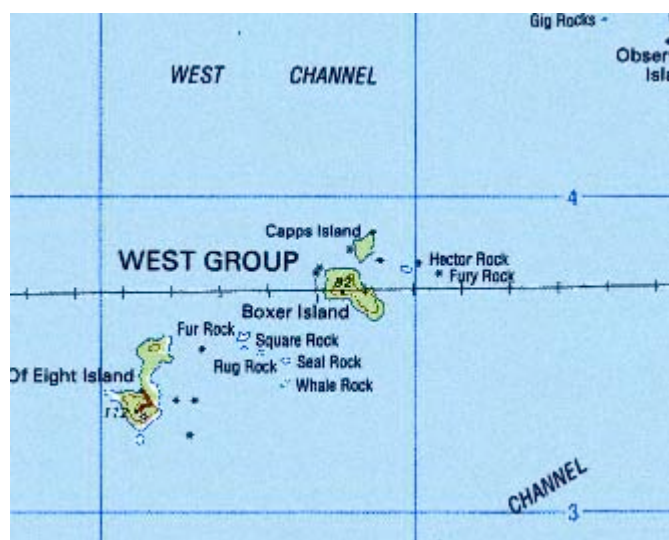
## Project background

### *Aims, expected outcomes and significance*

Recently, two archaeological sites of nineteenth century sealers and whalers have been discovered in the Recherche Archipelago (Figure 1).

### **Figure 1. Regional map.**

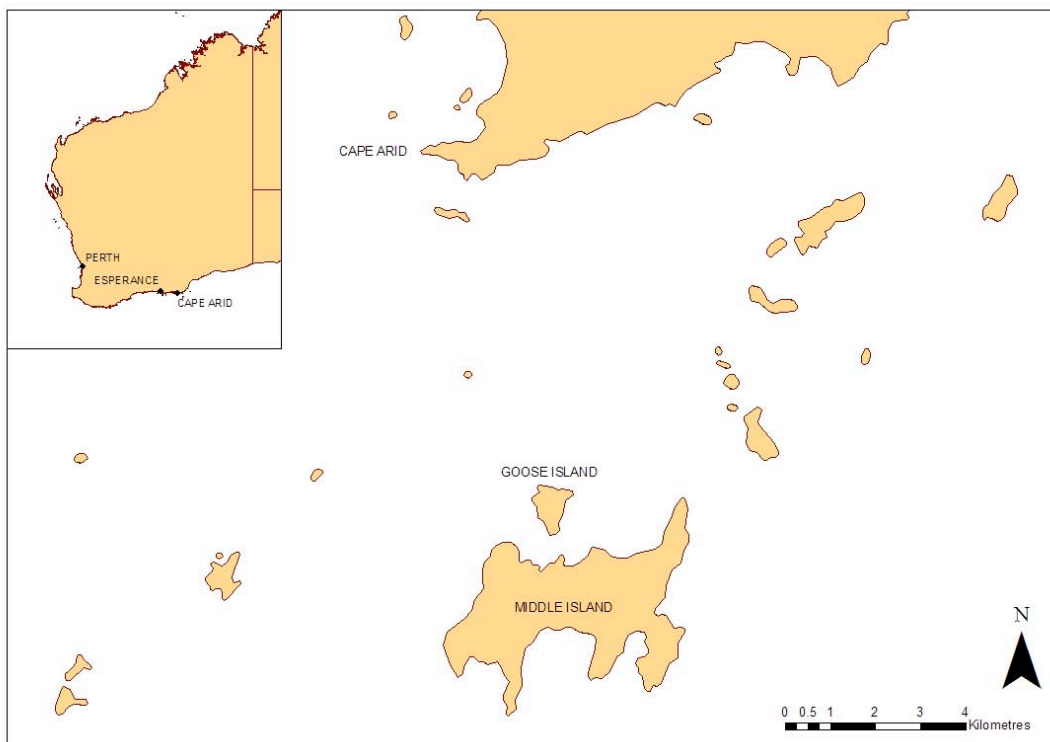
The site on Boxer Island is a small cave with evidence of occupation by sealers; this site had been reported in the mid-twentieth century, and was recently re-discovered by locals who removed seal skins seal skins from the cave (Figure 2). These are now held by the Western Australia Museum for conservation. A site associated with sealers is extremely rare, especially one with good preservation of archaeological material.



### **Figure 2. Boxer Island location.**

The site of Middle Island is a complex of archaeological remains related to a whaling establishment for which there are few historical accounts (Figure 3

and Figure 4). They had been reported previously, most recently during a visit by Department of Maritime Archaeology staff (Green, Souter and Baker 2001) who felt that the remains potentially related to a nineteenth-century whaling establishment for which there were few surviving historical accounts. There are other possible explanations, as detailed below.



**Figure 3. Middle Island location.**

Middle Island had been mapped during earlier historical expeditions (Vancouver, D’Entrecasteaux) and Matthew Flinders anchored there for two days in 1802. He revisited in 1803 for the purposes of “cutting wood, boiling down seal oil and killing geese” (Flinders 1814). The fishery was certainly present, for in 1862 an eight strong party was employed for the whale fishery on the island (Government Gazette 29<sup>th</sup> July, 1862, State Library Western Australia).





**Figure 4. Middle Island. The settlement remains are located behind the dune in centre of photograph. (Paterson 2006)**

There is great potential that both sites relate to early nineteenth century uses of the islands. Bechervaise (1954) states that sealers and whalers from eastern states sent crews to the archipelago from the 1820s, and Wace and Lovett (1973) find it possible that American sealers operated along the south coast of Western Australia from as early as 1800. This accords with some results from investigations in the Dampier Archipelago (Paterson 2006). Recent research suggests that some of these crews could be expected to include Aboriginal people, particularly women (Staniforth and Lawrence 1999). During the 1830s and 1840s accounts describe that Middle Island was “the Right Whale Station of the Bight” and the centre for sealing and whaling throughout the islands, one ruled by Black Jack Anderson, a notorious African American (McIlroy 1987:60). Today, all that remains of these historical activities are ruins and archaeological deposits.

Immediate outcomes of this research are: (1) new knowledge of these potentially significant historical sites and past industries; and (2) comparison with similar sites in eastern Australia. This report specifically deals with the first outcome, while further research and analyses are required to complete the second outcome.

Additionally, this pilot study assisted the development of a working group the **South Coast Cultural, Archaeological and Environmental Research Working Group** (SCCAERWG) to further heritage work and inter-disciplinary research in this region, and specifically to develop funding applications to explore the archaeological evidence for historical use of islands, coast and waterways on Western Australia’s southern coast.



### **Aims of pilot project**

- To investigate a recently discovered sealer's cave on Boxer Island (Easting 378142, Northing 6236485, Zone 51) for evidence of human occupation related to nineteenth century sealing.
- To test the landscape for archaeological evidence of seal processing on Boxer Island through survey.
- To survey archaeological remains of a whaling/sealing establishment on Middle Island (Easting 518634, Northing 6226421, Zone 51) and collect archaeological samples through excavation of activity areas (such as structures and concentrations of archaeological material).
- To analyse archaeological material from both islands to understand the timing, nature, organisation and character of colonial whaling and sealing extraction on these islands.
- To compare the archaeological findings with historical descriptions of the whaling and sealing industries, both in Western Australia and with the eastern colonies.
- Establish protocols for future archaeological research into sealing and whaling sites on the south coast.
- As the basis for ongoing archaeological research to develop a working relationship between disparate stakeholders—historical archaeologists, the WA Museum, DEC (formally CALM), local tour operators, Fisheries WA, Esperance Council and indigenous groups—with interests and responsibilities in the historical and future use of these islands.

### **Outcomes**

- New knowledge of significant historical sites of a type that have rarely survived intact to the present.
- Enhanced knowledge of the earliest European extraction industries in Western Australia.
- To provide a document that would allow the development of management protocols for DEC (formally CALM) given that these sites face immediate threats from visitation and bushfires.
- Research projects for archaeology students.
- Publications in refereed journals.
  - 1 paper reporting the archaeological sites
  - 1 paper/book chapter comparing these sites with whaling and sealing sites in South Australia, Victoria and Tasmania
- Museum exhibition material for the WA Museum (the museum is already in possession of the historical seal skins found in May 2005 by local amateur historians on Boxer Island).
- Protocols for future archaeological recording of similar sites.
- A working relationship between different stakeholders as the basis for future archaeological research on WA's southern coast.

## Significance

This research is significant for its potential to enhance our knowledge of a distinct early aspect of Western Australian history, namely the use of these islands by sealers and whalers. This is new information not obtainable any other way.

This localised knowledge is particularly significant for its comparative value. Over recent years there has been archaeological research into shore based whaling (although much less into sealing). This industry was mainly established along the northern Atlantic seaboard and Arctic from the 16<sup>th</sup> century onwards (Yentsch 1988), and when stocks diminished whalers sought whale populations across the globe until English-speaking whalers reached the bordering Pacific, Southern and Indian oceans following British settlement in Australia (Birmingham 1978). Archaeological research in Australasia has been synthesised (Kostoglou et al 1991; Staniforth and Lawrence 1998); although the focus has been less on archaeological evidence and more on historical accounts (Veth 1999). This is due to the fact that “new” undisturbed sites on Australia’s coastline are rare, and as such the sites in the Recherche Archipelago provide a rare opportunity for survey and excavation data that can potentially connect this area with larger patterns in the organisation and operation of Australia’s shore-based whaling and sealing industries. Some key questions have been raised in Staniforth and Lawrence’s review, as considered in the following paragraphs in relation to the study.

Firstly, *to what extent were Aboriginal people involved in whaling and sealing?* We may expect that the Recherche was the western expression of an industry which in the early–mid nineteenth century saw English-speaking whalers and sealers establish settlements through force and coercion with Aboriginal women, mainly from Tasmania. Evidence for this exists on islands off Tasmania, Victoria and South Australia, but not yet for Western Australia. The involvement of indigenous labour in these industries has been recognised for Australia (and in New Zealand with the Maori)—these studies provide a model for the material evidence for indigenous involvement. Some accounts suggest that Aboriginal people were present on both Middle and Boxer islands; however it remains unclear where these people were from, although locals were potentially in contact with the whalers and sealers.

Secondly, *what can the archaeological record reveal of the social and economic aspects of these sites?* This level of knowledge can only be developed through extensive archaeological survey, excavation and analysis. For Australia, this potential is perhaps best indicated at another Western Australian whale processing site, specifically at Cheynes Beach where Martin Gibbs (1995) was able to reconstruct past lifeways at the site, notably evidence for family life. His approach required extensive use of documentary sources, and this knowledge of sources will contribute greatly to our research. (Recently the archaeological site was reported to be destroyed during road works related to improving tourist access to the coast, revealing that even known significant archaeological sites are threatened in Australia.)

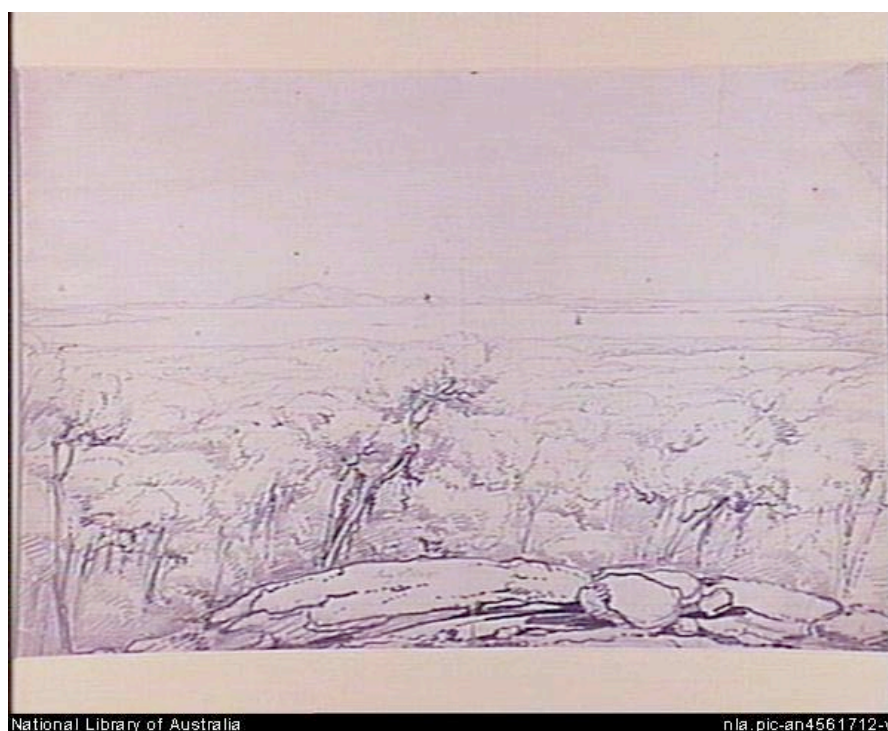
Thirdly, *how important were these early extraction industries to the growth of colonial economies and what was life like at the settlements?* Where were

the whalers and sealers from and provisioned from? What other industries and activities occurred? For example, some accounts suggest that on Middle Island salt extraction was attempted, probably in the late nineteenth century (*Walkabout*, 1 July 1952:42). How did resource extraction relate to other early industries across the colonies? The evidence for entrepreneurial capital at whaling sites has been demonstrated by Lawrence for Tasmanian whaling sites (Lawrence 2005) where the evidence for differing status in these settlements is reflected in the distribution of different artefacts, such as ceramics, revealing a managerial class. In this research by establishing the timing, scale and organisation of the whaling and sealing ventures on these two islands we hope to situate the evidence from the Recherche Archipelago within the bigger picture of the growth and development of colonial industries.

## Middle Island

### *Site history*

The Recherche Archipelago comprises numerous rocks, shoals and approximately 100 granite islands. Middle Island is part of a nature reserve vested in the Conservation Commission of WA and managed by DEC. Measuring 6.5km long, Middle Island is the largest in the group; 130km east of Esperance and 9km SSE offshore from Cape Arid. The island slopes from high cliffs on the south coast to a long beach and low granite coastline to the north. Flinders Peak, a large granite hill (174m) dominates the north-western end (Figure 5 and Figure 6). Lake Hillier, a shallow, pink brine lake which lies behind the coastal dune areas of Goose Island Bay completes the major landscape features of the island. The north side of Goose Island Bay offers a suitable anchorage for visiting ships. The island supports a complex mixture of vegetation ranging from low scrubs to melaleuca and eucalypt forests.



**Figure 5. Middle Island, view north to Cape Arid. Westall, William, 1781-1850. NLA pic an4561712v.jpg (<http://nla.gov.au/nla.pic-an4561712>)**

The earliest history of the Archipelago is associated with the first recorded visit to the Western Australia's south coast by the Dutch vessel *Gulde Zeepard* under the command of Pieter Nuyts (as recorded in Flinders' journal of 1801-1803). The next recorded visit to the area was in October 1791 by the *Discovery* under the command of Captain Vancouver. In 1792, Bruny D'Entrecasteaux arrived with the *La Recherche* and *L'Esperance* in search of La Perouse who had not been seen since his departure from Botany Bay in 1788. The island was originally named 'Ile de milieu' by D'Entrecasteaux being roughly in the middle of the archipelago. The journal of botanist

Jacques Julien Houton de Labillardiere *Relation du Voyage a la Recherché de La Perouse* (1799) discloses details of the D'Entrecasteaux voyage.

In 1802, when Matthew Flinders of the *Investigator* anchored on the north side of the island, he found evidence of possible earlier visitors. Botanist, Robert Brown, was sent ashore to collect plant specimens: 'The botanical gentlemen employed the day going around Middle Island but they found very little to reward their labour. A piece of fir plank, with nails in it, which seemed to have been part of a ship's deck, was picked up on shore; but no trace of the island having been visited, either by Europeans or the natives of the mainland was anywhere seen' (*Investigator* Ship's log in Radok 1990). Flinder's journal suggests that at least one crew member of the *Investigator* (Boatswain Charles Douglas) was buried on Middle Island (see also Green et al 2001).

In early 1818, Captain Philip Parker King is recorded as having anchored briefly off Middle Island in the *Mermaid* (Bechervaise 1954:4). In clearing the anchorage Flinders lost two anchors which were later recovered in 1973 in Goose Island Bay (Henderson 1980:240-1).

There are several structural ruins on Middle Island. The archaeological research is intended to determine which phases of use the ruins relate to.

The islands were frequented by sealers from the early 1800s. In October 1826 the French explorer Dumont d'Urville aboard the *Astrolabe* recounted having met eight Englishmen who had been marooned on Middle Island by the Captain of a sealing vessel *Governor Brisbane*. Major Edmond Lockyer, who landed at Albany (270 nautical miles west of Middle Island) from the *Amity*, makes references in his journals of 1827 to bands of sealers on Middle and Mondrain Islands (Bechervaise 1954:5). John 'Black Jack' Anderson was the most notorious of the sealers inhabiting Middle island. References to the sealing activities of Black Jack, his marooning of John Manning and James Newell from the wrecked cutter *Mountaineer* at Cape Arid in particular, are found in despatches from Government Residents at Albany. Further references to activities of sealers in the Archipelago are made in newspapers during the early 1840s (*Perth Gazette* and *Western Australian Journal*: 03/09/1842; 10/09/1842; 08/10/1842). The *Perth Inquirer* (05/01/1848) states that Middle Island had been 'for some time the resort of a set of lawless desperadoes, composed of runaway convicts, sealers etc' (Bechervaise 1954:6). Shipwrecks of sealing vessels occurring in the Middle island region include: *Belinda* (1824), *Mountaineer* (1835).

Whalers were active in these waters in the 1800s, and Middle Island was known to be a whaling station. The majority of whalers were American, although British and French crews were also present. The presence of whale bone around the site, lends weight to the hypothesis that the settlement in part derives from the activities of whalers.

There appears to be a hiatus in occupation on Middle Island until the late 1890s, although a number of shipwrecks and/or strandings occur in the intervening period: *Mary Ann* 1875, *Rodondo* 1894 and *Eclipse* 1898.

The next phase of occupation of Middle Island is understood to be that of a salt mining venture. T.C. Andrews worked the salt deposits of Lake Hillier on Middle Island as a young boy in 1889–1890. It was at his suggestion that the Australian Geographic Society embarked on an expedition to Middle Island in November 1950 to record the natural and cultural history of the island (Bechervaise 1954:3).

It is not understood if the structures at Middle Island relate to the salt extraction phase or an earlier period of whaling and/or sealing. The archaeological testing is intended to better resolve this issue.

### ***Previously described sites***

1. There are listed Aboriginal sites on Middle Island, with the excavated areas adjacent to one listed site (Site ID 1719) (Dortch and Morse). The historical settlement identified by Green, Souter and Baker (2001) and the subject of this current fieldwork is located at the northwestern extent of a granite outcrop upon which is located the scatter of artefacts (including glass and ceramics) that defines DIA site 1719 (reported by Dortch and Morse) (Figure 6). This work will better establish how these two adjacent historical sites are related, which they would appear to be. Material collected from site 1719 is held in the WA Museum and includes 75 stone artefacts, and several sherds of glass and pottery. Other artefact scatters, mainly stone tools, are recorded as sites elsewhere on Middle Island.
2. The historical settlement is listed on the Heritage Council of Western Australia register as Place 05051 Middle Island: “stone well, fireplaces and remains of wrecked steamer *Penguin* 1920”.



**Figure 6. Water trap on granite outcrop, Middle Island. (Paterson 2006)**



### **Site recording (methods)**

The archaeological investigation had two elements:

1. Survey of visible features and artefacts. In the case of artefacts, the often thick vegetation and decaying plant matter presumably obscured most archaeological material on the surface (Figure 7 and Figure 8). Thus, our recording was restricted to visible stone structures and their immediate surrounds, which we cleared of plants. The survey team used a Leica Total Station and OmniStar Differential GPS system. The survey plotted the location of individual artefacts, the spatial extent of features such as structural remains, and of archaeological samples. These surveyed points were provided with feature numbers, and for each site photographic records and paper recording forms were used. The data record sheets were designed to record information about material culture (both European and Aboriginal) to complement the excavated material.
2. Archaeological test excavations at structures. At some structures we conducted excavations to test for the depth and character of deposits (squares named below). These excavations were 1m squares, a limited program that reflected this being the first major archaeological investigation of the MI settlement complex, and the length of time for fieldwork.

Excavation units or contexts were numbered sequentially, and excavated sediments were weighed before being sieved through 6mm and 3mm sieve meshes. Material was then bagged and returned to UWA for analysis, to be conducted in 2007.



**Figure 7. Clearing the site of vegetation: during. (Paterson 2006)**





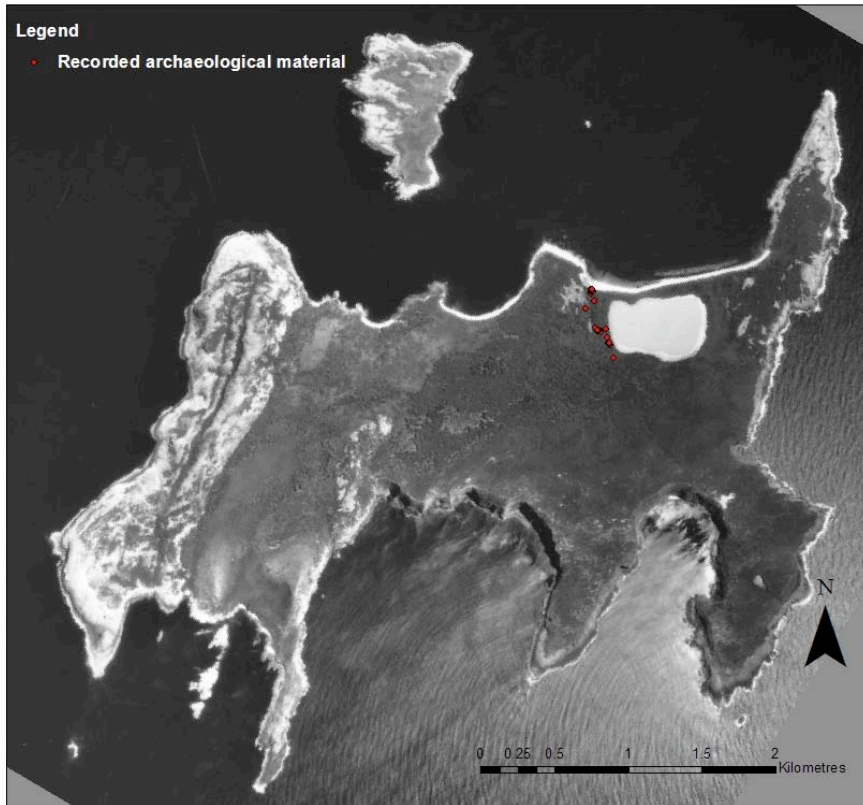
**Figure 8. Clearing the site of vegetation: after. (Paterson 2006)**



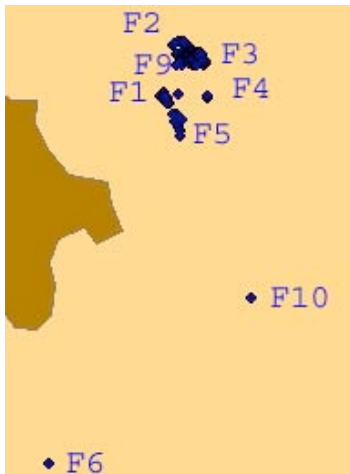
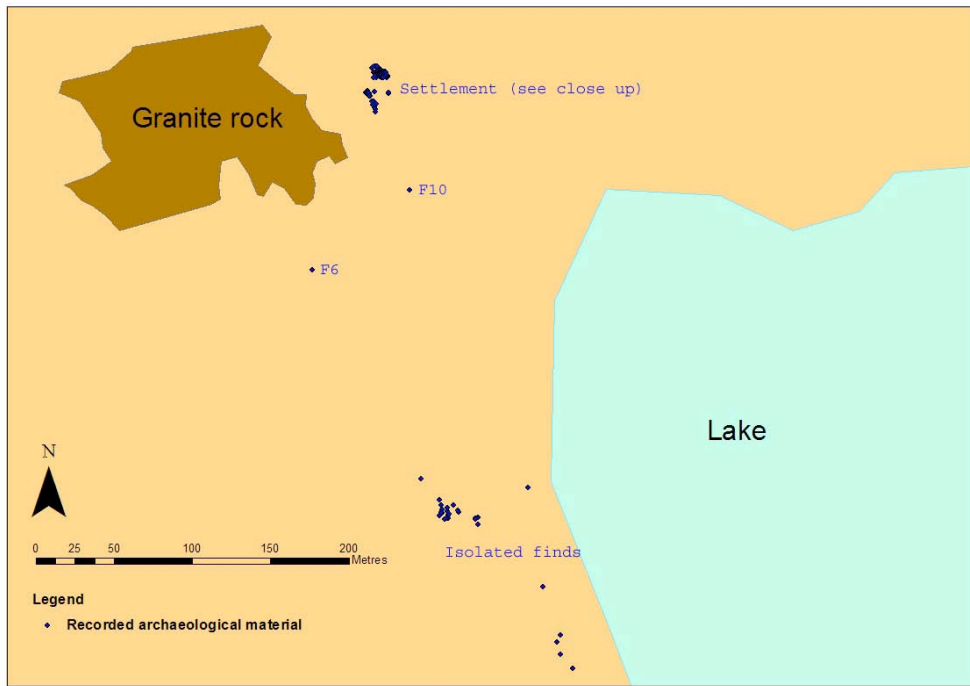
**Figure 9. Sieving of excavated materials: Ross Anderson and Ron (Doc) Reynolds. (Paterson 2006)**

### ***Preliminary findings and observations***

The following observations and description are preliminary. A final version of this report will describe the archaeological findings in detail. The feature numbers here follow from those provided in Green et al (2001); however several new stone structures were discovered in this fieldwork.



**Figure 10. Middle Island: Archaeological sites recorded in 2006. (Paterson 2006)**



**Figure 11. Middle Island: Archaeological sites between granite outcrop and lake. (Paterson 2006)**

The structural remains surveyed on Middle Island (Figure 10 and

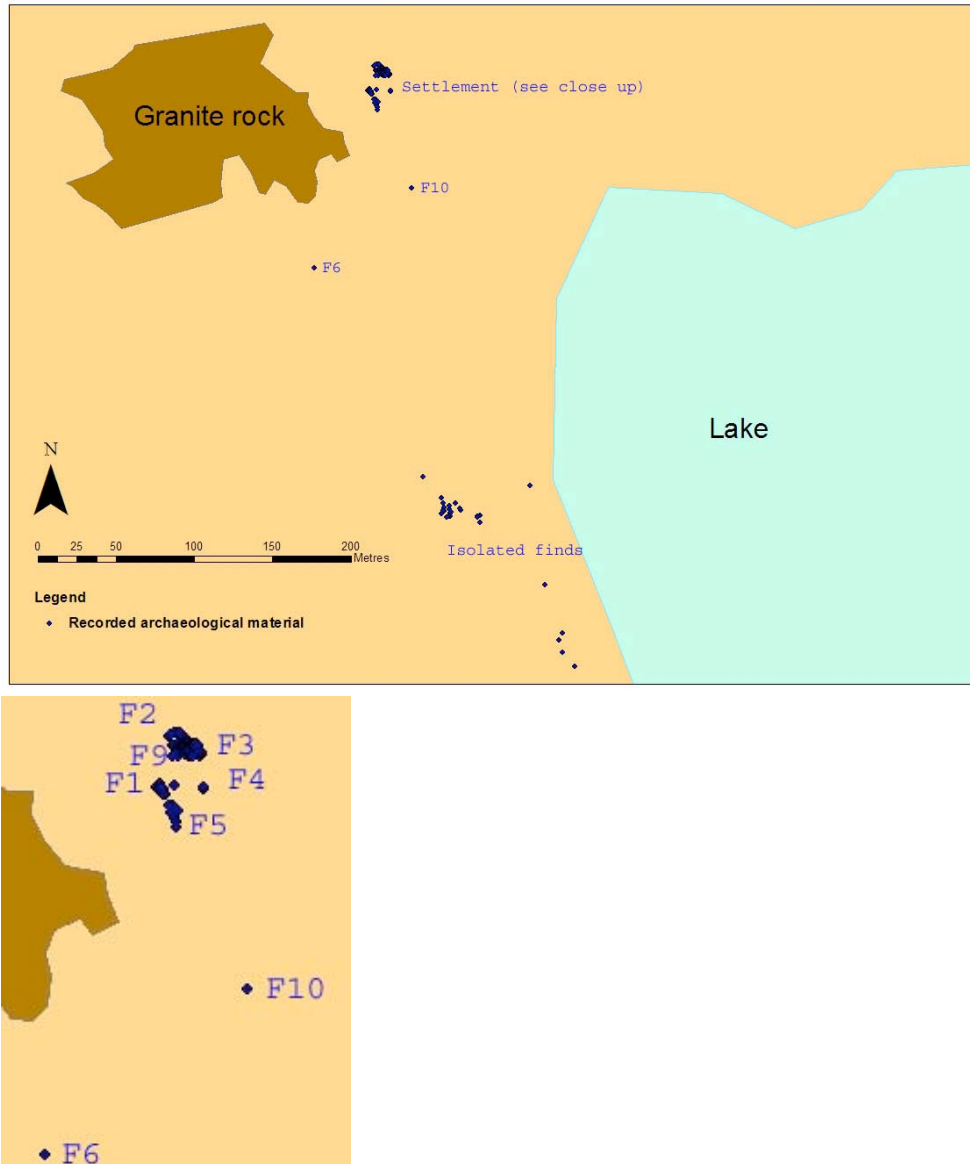


Figure 11) consisted of:

Feature 1. A stone 3 walled structure

Feature 2. A rectangular hut base with reconstructed stone walls and flagstone floor

Feature 3. Stone hearth

Feature 4. A stone lined circular well

Feature 5. Foundations of a stone 3 walled structure as well as a separate stone structure

Feature 6. Large two compartment hearth/oven

Feature 7. Stone well

Feature 8. Stone feature, possible structure.

Feature 9. Flagstone floor.

Feature 10. Stone feature.

Excavations (1 m square) were conducted in the immediate vicinity of several features (some shown in Figure 12):

Feature 1. Squares K16 and K12

Feature 3. Hearth contents (Figure 13 and Figure 14)

Feature 5. Squares J21 and K19 (Figure 17)

Feature 6. Square K11 (Figure 20)

Feature 9. Square P33 (Figure 15)

The sites in vicinity of Features 1, 5 2, and 9 are shown in Figure 12.

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32								
33								Vicinity of F9
34								
								Vicinity of F2

**Figure 12. Excavated squares in vicinity of features 1, 5 and 9.**

The excavated material will be described following analysis of the excavated material. We expect that this analysis will be able to better date the settlement, as well as provide some detail to the occupancy.





**Figure 13. Excavation of hearth (feature 3). (Paterson 2006)**



**Figure 14. Excavation of hearth (feature 3). (Paterson 2006)**





**Figure 15. Square P33, adjacent to feature 9. (Paterson 2006)**



**Figure 16. Square P33 (left), feature 2 and 9 (rear). Feature 3 in extreme foreground. (Paterson 2006)**





**Figure 17. Squares K 19 (foreground) and J21 at feature 1. (Paterson 2006)**



**Figure 18. Section of square J21 showing anthropogenic layers (dark, red) and sterile sand (grey) beneath.**





**Figure 19. Feature 5. Wall base revealed in excavation. (Paterson 2006)**



**Figure 20. Feature 6. Excavation square located on front of double hearth structure. (Paterson 2006)**

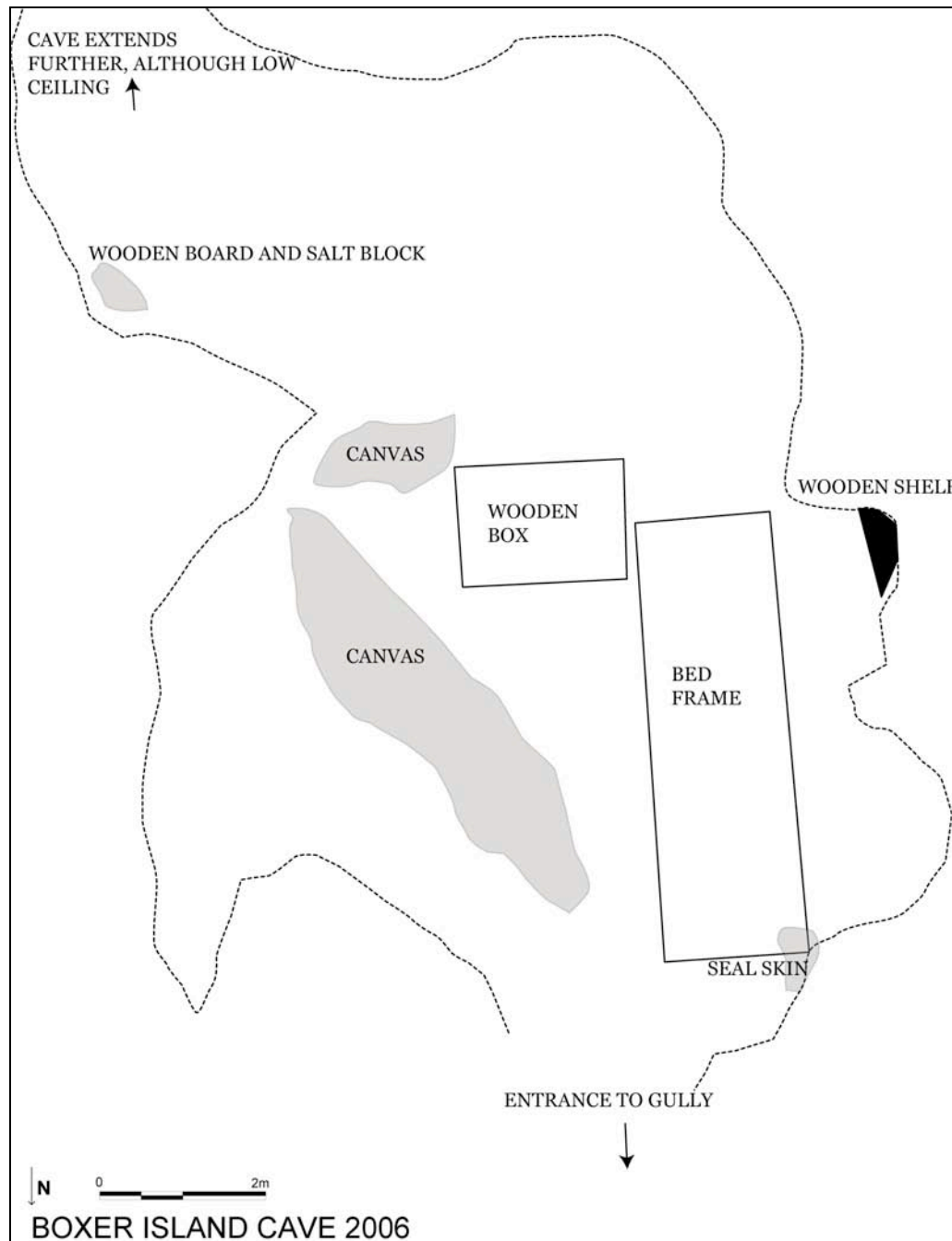


**Figure 21. Feature 6. Whale bone within 20 metres of feature. (Paterson 2006)**

## Boxer Island

### Site history

Boxer Island is located approximately six nautical miles SW of Esperance in the western Recherche Archipelago. The island consists of limestone platform on top of granite substrate. This high island is 2.3 kilometres long, offers limited landing points, and is covered with low laying vegetation mainly comprised of tea tree. The island has mainly rock shelters in the limestone formation, one of which contained evidence of historical use.



**Figure 22. Plan of cave on Boxer Island. (Paterson 2007 based on Anderson 2006)**

This cave is located in a small gully, with limestone cliff walls (Figure 22). Boxer Island is part of a nature reserve vested in the Conservation Commission of WA and managed by DEC. The cave is approximately 100m from the northern side of the island. The site was first reported by the 1950 Australian Geographic Society expedition. The site was rediscovered by a party from Esperance in April 2005 who described the remains of a simple bed, sealskins and other artefacts in the small cave (Wolfe 2005). A number of sealskins have been removed from the cave, as well as other artefacts—apparently these were all forwarded to the Esperance Municipal Museum in possession of Dot Andre (Esperance Municipal Museum). The following artefacts were reported by the 2005 expedition:

1. the possible remains of a pine framed bed or stretcher, with the remains of hessian bags attached
2. the remains of a wooden box at the end of the bed
3. three rolled seal skins in a timber box
4. several (two) badly corroded baking tins
5. a wooden shelf set into the wall of the cave
6. the remains of a canvas sail, tarpaulin or sheet with eyelets and a length of hemp/manila rope attached
7. a wooden box containing salt

Three seal skins were subsequently forwarded to WA Museum for conservation. Other artefacts, such as the baking tins, were discarded.

### ***Description of site***

The site was visited by us in April 2006, for an afternoon. It was clear from this visit that items seen in 2005 items—the bed, canvas, shelf, and salt—remained in the cave.

The rough layout of the cave and contents are shown in Figure 22.





**Figure 23. Boxer Island cave: Entrance (Doc Reynolds and Alistair Paterson) (WAM 2006)**



**Figure 24. Boxer Island cave: view down gully to Western Australian mainland coast. (Paterson 2006)**



**Figure 25. Boxer Island cave: Cave entrance with box, bed and canvas visible. (Paterson 2006)**



**Figure 26. Boxer Island cave: salt block in inner cave and remainder of site in rear. (Paterson 2006)**





**Figure 27. Boxer Island cave: rear of cave. (Paterson 2006)**



**Figure 28. Boxer Island cave: Bed frame, box and shelf. (Paterson 2006)**



**Figure 29. Boxer Island cave: Bed frame, box, canvas and second chamber beyond. (Paterson 2006)**



**Figure 30. Boxer Island cave: Box at foot of bed. (Paterson 2006)**





**Figure 31. Boxer Island cave: Seal skin and hessian on bed frame. (Paterson 2006)**



**Figure 32. Boxer Island cave: Shelf above bed.**



**Figure 33. Boxer Island cave: Salt block in second chamber. (Paterson 2006)**



### **Site recording (methods)**

Our methods involved photographic recording of visible material, and planning the cave with measuring tape. Some observations were made of the construction techniques of the sealskin box and bed.



**Figure 34. Boxer island cave: Team recording site. (Paterson 2006)**

The boxes show tongue and groove joinery and were constructed of  $\frac{3}{4}$  inch wide boards, with  $\frac{3}{16}$  inch groove.

Samples were taken of several materials:

1. the salt from the salt block and animal fur (presumably seal hair)
2. sail cloth
3. canvas
4. hessian matting



## Conclusions and recommendations

### *Middle Island*

The material excavated from the Middle Island structures requires analysis. Several lines of investigation are appropriate:

1. When were the structures used and for what purposes?
2. What site functions are indicated by the archaeological material? This includes a spatial analysis which takes into account features such as tramways and natural resources.
3. Are there any trends across the site to suggest different activities at the different structures?
4. What does the archaeological material indicate about life at the settlement? Two lines of inquiry seem particularly relevant. Firstly there were large amounts of animal bones recovered which may relate to inhabitant's diet. Secondly, is there any evidence of Aboriginal people in the archaeological remains?

Whilst this ongoing pilot study is a first step, further archaeological research on Middle Island is required to better understand the historical uses. From this expedition we recommend that a management plan is developed by DEC (formally CALM), WAM and other stakeholders to manage the historical precinct which encompasses the ruin structures through to the lake. Further survey may indicate a larger complex.

Fires in February 2007, have removed much of the thick vegetation which previously obscured the settlement and other archaeological remains. The next step leading to a site interpretation and management plan is a thorough site survey by a team of historical archaeologists.

We recommend:

1. Further archaeological work at this site following the analysis of excavated material in the future.
2. No disturbance of archaeological material at the site. Currently (in January 2007) visitors are collecting artefacts such as clay pipes from the site. Signage needs to be placed at the site which prohibits removal of artefacts and any form of digging into the site. Reference should be made to the site being eligible for protection under the *WA Maritime Act 1973* and being listed by Heritage Council of Western Australia register as Place 05051.
3. The GPS positions of all sites should not be released to the public given the sensitive nature of the archaeological material.
4. A reassessment of the archaeological material should be used to improve the current description of the settlement of the Heritage Council of Western Australia register Place 05051.
5. Any further earth disturbance work in the settlement should involve an historical archaeologist.
6. Following recent (February 2007) bushfires, an archaeological survey for sites and features should be conducted before regrowth occurs.

### *Boxer Island*

While the material from the site requires further analysis, it appears likely that this cave was used by sealers, and thus equates with nineteenth century activities in the islands. If so, the site is rare evidence of the sealing industry.

The site inevitably derives from a ship pre-1900 and has been abandoned and is thus eligible for protection under the *WA Maritime Act 1973*. As such, its management comes under the jurisdiction of the Department of Maritime Archaeology, WAM. We recommend:

1. Further scientific archaeological analysis of the site to better determine its use. We suggest excavation of the cave and cave entrance. Unfortunately, artefacts that may potentially have been used to date the site (the tin cans/baking dishes) have been discarded; however, excavation may provide a firmer date of deposit. Sealing appears to have started in the Recherche Archipelago in the 180s following the decline in seal numbers in Bass Strait and continued until the early twentieth century (Wolfe 2005). Beyond merely dating the site, the archaeology may provide physical evidence elsewhere for the domestic activities of sealers and their accommodation.
2. Samples of materials removed from the cave should be studied to determine their age and origin.
3. We recommend that an expert on historic DNA determines whether the DNA survives on the historic seal skins. Historical DNA and modern DNA may assist in understanding the diversity of past and present seal populations in the Recherche Archipelago.
4. The site should be listed by the Heritage Council of WA.
5. The site requires protection, and a joint management plan needs to be developed by CALM, the WA Museum, the Heritage Council of WA, and the Shire of Esperance.

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