Honours Research Thesis Proposal

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Title “Understanding Coastal Space: An investigation into a Indigenous and Non-Indigenous maritime cultural landscape at Port Willunga, South Australia.

Introduction This document outlines the proposed study for an honours thesis (15,000 words) in the years 2003 and 2004 at Flinders University. The research will be directed and written by Aidan Ash (B. Arch. Flinders University 2002).

The landscape exists physically; the material existence of culture and natural processes, and cognitively; how people think about the landscape and how this influences action to change the landscape. Archaeology has the potential to investigate both of these aspects of the cultural landscape to produce an increased understanding of human behaviour.

This thesis is an investigation into maritime cultural landscapes.
Aims, significance and expected outcomes.

This thesis aims to investigate, apply and evaluate cultural landscape theory in the context of the discipline of maritime archaeology. Currently there is much discussion among terrestrial archaeologists about the meanings and application of cultural landscape theory (Ucko and Layton 1999; von Droste et al, 1995). In the discipline of maritime archaeology, the concept of the archaeological interpretation of cultural landscapes remains a relatively unexplored topic. Some studies into maritime cultural landscapes (Duncan 2000, Firth 1993, McErlean et al 2002, Parker 1999) have shown the scope and application of cultural landscape interpretation is greatly beneficial to the understanding of past maritime cultures. Westerdahl (1992) initiated the term ‘maritime cultural landscape’ in his paper in the International Journal of Nautical Archaeology. This paper outlined the potential for the discipline of maritime archaeology to interpret the seascape and landscape in the context of maritime culture rather than focusing research on shipwrecks. The study of shipwrecks has dominated the study of maritime archaeology. Shipwrecks are an important source to understand maritime culture. However, the archaeology of shipwrecks represents one aspect of a source of information about maritime activity. Other aspects include ports, harbours, lighthouses and shipping routes which all form parts of the cultural landscape.

The location chosen for the investigation is the area of Port Willunga, situated south of Adelaide on the east side of the Gulf of St Vincent. To both Indigenous and Non-Indigenous people, this area has been an important place. For Indigenous people it was a
fishing and living place (Hemming 1985). For Non-Indigenous people, the area was a port during the latter part of the 19th century and early 20th century Dunstan (1977). The area has many physical remains relating to maritime activity. There are the remains of two jetties, ‘dug out’ caves for storage exist in a cliff, there is a the remains of a harbour masters residence (Lawrence and Jackman 1995) and there are Indigenous sites with fish otoliths and tools in the dunes either side of the creek. Several wrecks exist in the bay, the most famous being the *Star of Greece* (1868-1888) (Sexton 1982). The wrecking of this vessel had an impact on the area. All these remains are potential sources of information about the cultural landscape/seascape. This thesis aims to analyse the area through different informational sources: the physical remains, memory of local people, and historical documents to determine why this place became a port for non Indigenous people and an important habitation and fishing site for Indigenous people.

To aid the interpretation of the study, grounded theory will be used as a research tool to assess qualitative data. Grounded theory has been developed in the social sciences (Strauss and Corbin 1998) and aims to develop the relationship between theory and methods of qualitative research. It is recognised that the assessment of cultural landscapes is a qualitative activity where human perception and evaluation takes place (Bender 1999). Therefore the study is subjective. This theory is seen as useful for structuring the analysis and evaluation of the data from the fieldwork.
In summary the thesis will:

1. Investigate the current and potential use of cultural landscape theory in maritime archaeology.
3. Apply grounded theory to the structure and organisation of the research.
4. Identify the motives and influences for Indigenous and non-Indigenous selection of site location for the various cognitive and physical activities that took part and shaped the cultural landscape at Port Willunga.
5. Discuss the relevance of the investigation for maritime archaeological research and cultural heritage management.

The thesis will have benefits for several communities. For the local community it is anticipated that the research can be used as a reference for cultural heritage management of the area. The information within the thesis would be a relevant reference for onsite interpretation and may aid significance assessment studies of heritage sites at Port Willunga.

For maritime archaeology in Australia as a discipline, the research will add to the discussion of how maritime archaeologists interpret maritime history and coastal areas. It will argue that the application of cultural landscape theory can progress the discipline to
gain access to greater understandings of maritime activity. This research also seeks to be a cross-cultural study of both Indigenous and Non-Indigenous peoples. The aim is to gain a holistic interpretation of the area and this could not be done without the study of both cultures.

It is anticipated that from the body of research, suitable papers will be produced for submission for the Australasian Institute of Maritime Archaeology, International Journal of Nautical Archaeology, and the Australian Archaeological Association Journal. Publication is seen as crucial in communicating the research to a wider audience.

**Research plan, methods and timing.**

**Review of Literature**

The review of Literature will be a study of the texts relating to the discussion of archaeology and the cultural landscape. Also, reviewing literature that is relevant in placing this discussion in the context of studies of maritime archaeology in Australia. Research into the primary and secondary texts and archives that relate to the Port Willunga area will be undertaken.

**Timing**  January – December 2003
Fieldwork

The aim of the fieldwork is to obtain data that suits the methodologies relevant to understanding the maritime cultural landscape and satisfy the aims previously outlined in this proposal. Therefore a range of data sources will be used which will involve fieldwork. Fieldwork will include field survey, oral history interviews, and underwater survey. Fieldwork data will supplement the historical documents and will support arguments relating to the assessment of the character of the settlement that occurred for both Indigenous and Non-Indigenous people.

Due to the close proximity of the location to Adelaide, the survey will be done on day trips with volunteers. A week of intensive survey is planned in late 2003, early 2004. Survey will include the use of a total station to record the location of Indigenous and Non-Indigenous sites. Photography and drawing will be carried out in accordance with acceptable archaeological recording methods. Oral history will be used to understand the use of the fisherman’s ‘dug out’ caves. Topographical and nautical maps will be used.

Timing  


One week intensive.
Computer programs used for the processing of data from fieldwork.

**Photoshop 5.5** for manipulation of photographs.

**Photomodeller** 4.0, a programme used to survey a site using multiple photographs, each with linked reference points to allow programme to determine distances.

**Site Surveyor** 1.3 to collate and produce a site map of the area.

**ArcView**, a Geographical Information System (GIS), will also be used to create a site plan using data retrieved from a total station survey.

**Oral Histories**

Oral histories will be carried out to determine the function of the caves and to gain an interpretation of the fishing industry. Several residents who are descendents of fisherman of the area hold valuable information about the function of the 'dug out' caves. The *Oral History Handbook* (Robertson 1994) will be used as a guide for the process of carrying out the oral history research. There are no courses conducted in South Australia which teach the application of Oral Histories.

**Timing**

June 2003 – February 2004

**Ethics**

Ethics approval will be considered by the Flinders University Social and Behavioural Research Ethics Committee.
Research involving Indigenous culture needs approval before the research can proceed.

Timing  
June 2003

Budget

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| TOTAL COST | $430 |
| Self Funded | $330 |
| Flinders University | $100 |

Thesis completion

The honours thesis will be submitted for marking in October 2004.
References


Firth, A., 1993, Three Facets Of Maritime Archaeology: Society, Landscape and Critique, Theoretical Advances in Maritime Archaeology Seminar, Durham. University of Southampton Website: http://www.arch.soton.ac.uk/Research/Firth/


