

Heritage (Decision about Registration for the Aboriginal Digging Stick) Notice 2012

Notifiable Instrument NI 2012 - 92

made under the

Heritage Act 2004 section 42 Notice of Decision about Registration

1. Revocation

This instrument replaces NI 2011-634

2. Name of instrument

This instrument is the Heritage (Decision about Registration for the Aboriginal Digging Stick) Notice 2012 -

3. Registration details of the place

Registration details of the place are at Attachment A: Register entry for the Aboriginal Digging Stick.

4. Reason for decision

The ACT Heritage Council has decided that the Aboriginal Digging Stick meets one or more of the heritage significance criteria at s 10 of the *Heritage Act 2004*. The register entry is at Attachment A.

5. Date of Registration

23 February 2012

Gerhard Zatschler
Secretary
ACT Heritage Council
23 February 2012



ACT Heritage Council

AUSTRALIAN CAPITAL TERRITORY

**HERITAGE REGISTER
(Registration Details)**

For the purposes of s. 41 of the *Heritage Act 2004*, an entry to the heritage register has been prepared by the ACT Heritage Council for the following place:

Aboriginal Digging Stick

Namadgi National Park

DATE OF REGISTRATION

23 February 2012 Notifiable Instrument: 2012-

Copies of the Register Entry are available for inspection at the ACT Heritage Unit. For further information please contact:

The Secretary
ACT Heritage Council
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IDENTIFICATION OF THE OBJECT

Aboriginal Digging Stick

Namadgi National Park

STATEMENT OF HERITAGE SIGNIFICANCE

The Aboriginal Digging Stick provides exceptional evidence of traditional Aboriginal lifeways, it bears clear evidence of being shaped by human hand and having been used for digging and other purposes.

Early Aboriginal wooden artefacts – including those found in situ – have a low survival rate in the ACT and south eastern Australia, due to unfavourable environmental conditions. The Digging Stick is the only known example of its kind found in the ACT.

The intactness of the Aboriginal Digging Stick, and its excellent provenance in an area of the Cotter River District, make it an exceptional and very rare example of its kind.

The Aboriginal Digging Stick is a potential research object, that may – after further examination – allow for unequalled insight into past Aboriginal economies in the context of the ACT.

The object is strongly evocative of particular traditional Aboriginal lifeways, and this combined with its rarity and intactness, make it an item highly valued by the Aboriginal community.

FEATURES INTRINSIC TO THE HERITAGE SIGNIFICANCE OF THE OBJECT

A 1240mm long cylindrical wooden shaft (the Object) shaped by human hand, tapered at its distal end and compacted at its proximal end.

APPLICABLE HERITAGE GUIDELINES

The guiding conservation objective is that the object defined in this citation shall be conserved and appropriately managed in a manner respecting its heritage significance and the features intrinsic to that heritage significance, and consistent with a sympathetic and viable use or uses. Any works that have a potential impact on significant fabric (and / or other heritage values) shall be guided by a professionally documented assessment and conservation policy relevant to that area or component (i.e. a Statement of Heritage Effects – SHE).

Any Aboriginal Heritage Guidelines adopted under s25 of the *Heritage Act 2004* will be applicable to the conservation of the Aboriginal Digging Stick.

A Conservation Management Plan should guide the conservation of the site and the stick in situ and determine the conditions under which the removal of the stick might be necessary, and the subsequent management of the object.

REASON FOR REGISTRATION

The Aboriginal Digging Stick has been assessed against the heritage significance criteria and been found to have heritage significance when assessed against seven criteria under the ACT *Heritage Act 2004*:

- c) it is important as evidence of a distinctive way of life, taste, tradition, religion, land use, custom, process, design or function that is no longer practised, is in danger of being lost or is of exceptional interest;
- d) it is highly valued by the community or a cultural group for reasons of strong or special religious, spiritual, cultural, educational or social associations;
- e) it is significant to the ACT because of its importance as part of local Aboriginal tradition
- f) it is a rare or unique example of its kind, or is rare or unique in its comparative intactness
- g) it is a notable example of a kind of place or object and demonstrates the main characteristics of that kind
- h) it has strong or special associations with a person, group, event, development or cultural phase in local or national history
- j) it has provided, or is likely to provide, information that will contribute significantly to a wider understanding of the natural or cultural history of the ACT because of its use or potential use as a research site or object, teaching site or object, type locality or benchmark site

ASSESSMENT AGAINST THE HERITAGE SIGNIFICANCE CRITERIA

Pursuant to s.10 of the *Heritage Act 2004*, a place or object has heritage significance if it satisfies one or more of the following criteria. Significance has been determined by research as accessed in the references below. Future research may alter the findings of this assessment.

- (a) it demonstrates a high degree of technical or creative achievement (or both), by showing qualities of innovation, discovery, invention or an exceptionally fine level of application of existing techniques or approaches;**

The Aboriginal Digging Stick does not meet this criterion to a significant degree.

- (b) it exhibits outstanding design or aesthetic qualities valued by the community or a cultural group;**

The Aboriginal Digging Stick does not meet this criterion to a significant degree.

- (c) it is important as evidence of a distinctive way of life, taste, tradition, religion, land use, custom, process, design or function that is no longer practised, is in danger of being lost or is of exceptional interest;**

The Aboriginal Digging Stick is important as evidence for a distinctive way of life no longer practised by Aboriginal people in the ACT. Past Aboriginal lifeways are represented by the stick, which was probably once used for the purpose of foraging for foodstuffs, or possibly as an occasional weapon or walking aid.

The Aboriginal Digging Stick meets this criterion.

- (d) it is highly valued by the community or a cultural group for reasons of strong or special religious, spiritual, cultural, educational or social associations;**

The Aboriginal community in the ACT constitutes a cultural group under this criterion, and the Aboriginal Digging Stick is highly valued by the Aboriginal community for reasons of special cultural association. The Aboriginal community draws cultural value from Aboriginal heritage places and objects, irrespective of their assessed scientific or heritage value, or their status on the ACT Heritage Register. Cultural

association and significance is therefore derived by the Aboriginal community from the object. However, the association is enhanced by the uniqueness of the Digging Stick (see criterion f) and the attachment it has with past specific Aboriginal lifeways (see criterion c).

The Aboriginal Digging Stick meets this criterion.

(e) it is significant to the ACT because of its importance as part of local Aboriginal tradition

The Aboriginal Digging Stick is significant to the ACT because of its part in Aboriginal tradition. It represents the long term Aboriginal occupation of the ACT, as it is an evocative example of a specific form of traditional Aboriginal resource procurement.

The Aboriginal Digging Stick meets this criterion.

(f) it is a rare or unique example of its kind, or is rare or unique in its comparative intactness

The Digging Stick is a unique example of its kind, as it is the only known occurrence of an in situ wooden artefact of Aboriginal provenance in the ACT.

The Aboriginal Digging Stick meets this criterion

(g) it is a notable example of a kind of place or object and demonstrates the main characteristics of that kind

The Aboriginal Digging Stick is a notable example of its kind, due to its uniqueness (see criterion f) and its intactness, demonstrating the main characteristics of its kind. These characteristics include evidence for twig removal, the presence of tool cut marks (perhaps indicative of shaping), a well formed point at the distal end, the rounded shape of the proximal end, and the overall shape and convenient size of the object which indicate it was deliberately fashioned by human hand¹ for use as a digging stick. Moreover, the wood belongs to the Acacia species, known to have been used by Aboriginal people as a material used to craft wooden artefacts.

The Aboriginal Digging Stick meets this criterion.

(h) it has strong or special associations with a person, group, event, development or cultural phase in local or national history

The Aboriginal Digging Stick has strong associations with economies in traditional Aboriginal culture. The digging stick was an object customarily used by Aboriginal people in food and resource procurement, and sometimes perhaps as a weapon or means of defence.

The Aboriginal Digging Stick meets this criterion.

(i) it is significant for understanding the evolution of natural landscapes, including significant geological features, landforms, biota or natural processes.

This criterion is not applicable to the Object.

(j) it has provided, or is likely to provide, information that will contribute significantly to a wider understanding of the natural or cultural history of the ACT because of its use or potential use as a research site or object, teaching site or object, type locality or benchmark site

¹ Kamminga, J, *Microscopic Examination of the Digging Stick at the Digging Stick Site, Namadgi National Park, ACT*, Report to Canberra Archaeological Society Inc, Canberra, 2001, p. 6.

The Aboriginal Digging Stick is likely to provide information that will contribute significantly to a wider understanding of the cultural history of the ACT, because of its use as a potential research object. Further analysis of the Object may yield significant new information on its use as an integral tool in past Aboriginal culture. This may enhance the present understanding of traditional Aboriginal movements, use of, and engagement with the ACT landscape.

The Aboriginal Digging Stick meets this criterion.

(k) for a place—it exhibits unusual richness, diversity or significant transitions of flora, fauna or natural landscapes and their elements

This criterion is not applicable to the Object.

(l) for a place—it is a significant ecological community, habitat or locality for any of the following:

- (i) the life cycle of native species;**
- (ii) rare, threatened or uncommon species;**
- (iii) species at the limits of their natural range;**
- (iv) distinct occurrences of species.**

This criterion is not applicable to the Object

SUMMARY OF THE PLACE HISTORY AND PHYSICAL DESCRIPTION

It is recognised that the Ngunnawal people are traditionally affiliated with the lands within the Canberra region. The Ngunnawal people draw cultural significance from the Aboriginal Digging Stick and strongly associate with objects such as these that are of cultural significance. However, it is also acknowledged that other local and regional Aboriginal groups with traditional affiliations to the Canberra region draw significance from objects such as the Aboriginal Digging Stick. In this citation, 'Aboriginal community' refers to the Ngunnawal people and other Aboriginal groups within the ACT who draw significance from the Object. Whilst the term 'Aboriginal community' acknowledges these said groups in the ACT, it is recognised that their traditional territories extend outside contemporary borders.

The stick is described by Argue² and Kamminga³ as a cylindrical wooden shaft 1240mm long, tapered at the distal end on one side to a 20mm wide shovel shaped point. The tapered section is 230mm long, and is defined by elongated ridges on both sides. The diameter of the stick varies, measuring 20mm at the compacted and multifaceted proximal end.

Kamminga⁴ observes the following details about the stick: the wood surface is smooth, with no bark adhering to the wood. Three cut marks made with an implement were identified, with no clear evidence to indicate whether either a stone or a steel tool had made them. However, a steel tool seems probable, due to the absence of abrasion that would imply stone cutting. The stick is uniformly grey, although it is unconfirmed whether the colouring is owing to fire hardening or natural ageing of the wood.

There is bruising present on the butt of the stick, indicating its possible use as a one-time walking stick.⁵

The apex of the chisel end has been shaped by charring, grinding, or cutting with a sharp implement (or shaped by all three). During historic times, Aboriginal people were recorded to have charred implements in order to sharpen or harden the points of spears or digging sticks that needed constant maintenance.⁶

² D, 'Discovery of a possible digging stick in the southeast region of Australia,' *Australian Archaeology*, p. 38.

³ op. cit. p. 3

⁴ *ibid*, p. 5.

⁵ *ibid*, p. 6.

The wood has been identified to the generic level as *Acacia* sp. It may be a sapling or perhaps a relatively straight branch with some small twigs. Acacias comprise about 35% of woody species known to have been used by Aboriginal people for making artefacts, a figure representing 49 of the approximately 830 species of *Acacia* in Australia. This is an unusual example of *Acacia* being used in the upper montane zone of the Australian Alps.⁷

Argue, Hope, and Saunders⁸ observe that digging sticks were often part of a woman's tool kit, usually used in conjunction with a wooden container when collecting plant foods, tubers, and small game. As the digging stick loosened the earth, the container was used to scoop out the soil. The sticks were selected from the saplings of any tough wood, shaped appropriately, with one or both ends then fire-hardened.

Environmental factors such as heat, sun, cold and moisture rarely permit for the survival of wooden artefacts in south eastern Australia and the ACT.

Digging sticks were recognised as female symbols – although the Digging Stick cannot be directly linked with women – and one ethnographic example records Fanny Balbuk, a prominent Noongar woman (Swan River, WA) adopting it as an emblem of resistance to white occupation, when she used it to destroy fence palings on occasion when new houses were built.⁹

Flood¹⁰ documents ethnographic references to the use of digging sticks in the high country of south east Australia. One reference describes the digging stick as “The commonest implement...a plain stout cudgel about four feet long, sharpened and hardened in the fire at one end. It was used for digging out roots and other food from the ground and in case of need served defensive purposes.”

Other ethnographic records affirm that the sticks were valuable items. Flood documents a particular record observing their role in a trading event in Bega, involving exchange between groups from the high country and coastal region¹¹

References

Argue, Debbie. 'Discovery of a Possible Digging Stick in the southeast region of Australia. *Australian Archaeology*. 1995. 41:38-39.

Argue, Debbie, Hope, Geoff., Saunders, Patricia. *Digging Stick Site. Namadgi National Park, ACT*. Report to the Canberra Archaeological Society Inc. Canberra. 1997.

Kamminga, Johan. *Microscopic examination of the digging stick at the Digging Stick Site, Namadgi National Park, ACT*. Report to the Canberra Archaeological Society Inc. Canberra. 2001.

National Museum of Australia. *First Australians: Fanny Balbuk's Story*. Retrieved 31 March 2011. <http://www.nma.gov.au/exhibitions/now_showing/first_australians/resistance/fanny_balbuk/>

⁶ Kamminga, J, 1988, p. 28 cited in Kamminga, op. cit. p. 6.

⁷ Kamminga op. cit. p. 3.

⁸ op. cit. p. 15

⁹ National Museum of Australia, *Exhibition: Fanny Balbuk Objects*, retrieved 31 March 2011, <http://www.nma.gov.au/exhibitions/now_showing/first_australians/resistance/fanny_balbuk/>

¹⁰ 1980, p. 49. cited in Argue et. al. op. cit. p. 15

¹¹ 1980, p. 114, cited in Argue et. al. op. cit. p. 16