



# Islands of the Recherche Heritage Project

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Seven eager participants arrived from around the world to take part in the inaugural Gabbie Kylie Applied Heritage Management Field School on 19 January 2009.

The four-week intensive provided students with a unique opportunity to gain practical experience in a range of archaeological techniques, while discovering the exceptional heritage and ecological values of south Western Australia. The field school culminated in a seven-day archaeological survey of the Recherche Archipelago, in Western Australia on board the STS Leeuwin II.

In early February, the research team, comprising students, Traditional Owners and specialists in terrestrial and maritime archaeology, geology and land management, boarded the STS Leeuwin II at Esperance. I was lucky enough to be among the 35 participants, who jumped at the chance to get out of the office, and get involved with the realization of this exciting project.

The Recherche Archipelago, located off the Esperance coast, is comprised of more than one hundred islands which were inhabited during the last Ice Age, when they were still connected to the continental mainland.

Rising sea levels and drifting sands swept across the hundreds of granite domes and outcrops that characterise the Archipelago today, preceding the great flood that inundated the area and created the present day coastline and spectacular Bay of Isles.

The terrain is rugged and spectacular, and a great deal of new information was recorded. Surveys at New Island Bay, Ben Island and Middle Island revealed a complex pattern of human history and use. The data that was collected included stone artefact distributions, patterns of human movement and use of an ancient coastal/littoral environment, detail about the formation of the lakes and dunes of Middle Island, and models of sea-level change and island formation.

A model depicting the human responses to these climatic changes will be developed by integrating this survey data with sea-floor mapping. Ultimately, the information will not only provide a greater understanding of the ancient history and landscapes of the Archipelago, it will also assist in the development of more

effective management processes for the future, including planning for climate change.

The holistic, community-based model employed by the Gabbie Kylie Foundation greatly enhanced the outcomes of the project, by supporting the exchange of cultural and technical knowledge. In addition to conducting archaeological surveys of the islands, students and experts worked alongside to conduct assessments of some of the maritime heritage associated with the archipelago, and record geological evidence pertaining to the formation of the island features, such as the spectacular Hillier's Lake on Middle Island. The commitment and enthusiasm of participants was obvious, and we returned grubby and exhausted (but still smiling) at the end of each day.

This experience has definitely been a highlight of my five years at the National Trust. It was great to see months of hard work pay off, and it was a real privilege to work alongside people with such vast knowledge and diverse backgrounds.

If you are interested in participating in future field schools, or you would like to learn more about the work of the Gabbie Kylie Foundation, please contact the National Trust on 08 9321 6088 or visit our website at [www.naturalheritage.org.au/Gabbie\\_Kylie\\_Foundation.html](http://www.naturalheritage.org.au/Gabbie_Kylie_Foundation.html).

#### Feedback from field school participants:

*"It was a fantastic field school in an incredible part of Australia."*

*"I love a challenge and this field trip helped me achieve things I thought I could never do."*

*"I got a great deal from the information provided by all academic and professional instructors and Traditional Owners and consider their participation to be the core strength of the field school."*

*"I really felt listened to and respected by professionals."*

*"I honestly could not see how it could be improved; keep up the good work!"*

**ABOVE LEFT** | The STS Leeuwin II provided a unique home away from home for the students during the inaugural Gabbie Kylie field school. National Trust (WA).

**ABOVE RIGHT** | The research team included field school students, Traditional Owners and specialists in archaeology and geology. D Wright