

10TH ANNIVERSARY FEATURE

NATURAL HERITAGE



STONE ARTEFACTS KEY TO RECHERCHE ARCHIPELAGO RESEARCH

Alan Briggs and Catherine Morgan

Following the highly successful archaeology and cultural field trips in February and April 2009, the Gabbie Kylie Foundation and the National Trust have engaged a research assistant to unlock further Aboriginal cultural significance for the south coast region.

Catherine Morgan accepted the position and has commenced working in the WA Museum offices in Albany under the guidance of acknowledged Archaeologist, David Guilfoyle. David, along with Doc Reynolds, is a key contributor within the Gabbie Kylie Foundation providing planning, guidance and research for field trips and project works on the south coast.

“Over the past month or so I have been tucked away in a little corner of the Residency Museum, which is part of the WA Museum complex in Albany,” Ms Morgan said.

“I have a number of stone artefacts that were collected from islands in the Recherche Archipelago, along the south coast of Esperance, WA, in the 1980s by archaeologists Charles Dortch & Kate Morse,” she said.

Stone tools are the most commonly found archaeological material in Australia and were manufactured and used by Aboriginal people as part of their sustainable strategies for hunting, fishing, and gathering over tens of thousands of years. The analysis of these stone tools can provide a better understanding of the incredible and complex culture of the Aboriginal people of Australia.

Researchers understand that the artefacts must have been placed on the islands 5 000 years ago, before the sea levels rose to their present levels.

Prior to the Gabbie Kylie Foundation (Keppa Kurl/ Applied Archaeology Australia collaboration) Field school this year, little archaeological research had been carried out on Indigenous sites of the Recherche Archipelago except for the studies and collections by Charles Dortch and Kate Morse in the 1980s and Moya Smith in the 80s and 90s.

Previous findings demonstrated that before the rise of the sea levels during the Last Glacial Maximum (18 000 - 7 000BP), the islands would have been granite domes dotted along the coastal plain, and due to the presence of artefacts, were clearly used by indigenous people to manufacture stone tools, gather food and water and other activities.

During the colonial period the islands were used by American and English whalers and sealers, some of whom took Indigenous women from the mainland for company. There is evidence of this habitation, in the form of stone structures, timber and other historical artefacts such as glass points (evidence that glass was used to make traditional Indigenous tools).

“Although it is evident these islands have been used by people for thousands of years, there is little understanding of their use prior to the Colonial times and I am hoping that my studies will contribute to a large database of information that can provide a greater understanding about the land-use and settlement patterns of the islands and surrounding regions of Esperance,” Ms Morgan said.

The analysis of the artefacts involves measuring and recording of certain attributes which can then be used in comparative studies with other assemblages from the surrounding regions of Esperance and the southern coast. These comparisons can be used to gain a better understanding of wider cultural/social differences and changes.

For instance, as Guilfoyle (2005) demonstrates, the study of raw material procurement is a good way to link stone artefact assemblages to the over-all study of land-use patterns and how groups of people traded or related to each other.

“Once these artefacts are analysed, I can use them to develop a preliminary model on the land-use and settlement patterns of the islands, which were part of the coastal plain during the Pleistocene and early Holocene, prior to the rise of the sea levels”.

This work has also given me the chance to assist with further field projects and with the Gabbie Kylie Foundation through the Esperance Region.

This opportunity wouldn't be possible, however, if it wasn't for the National Trust (WA) and the WA Museum. I must thank Dr Moya Smith and Alice Beale (WA Museum) for packaging and transferring the artefacts to Albany to allow me to analyse them there; and also the Albany Museum staff for accommodating me”.



Catherine Morgan goes with Stone Artefacts. Natural heritage.

References

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