

Basic Detail Report



Indigenous bark canoe from Wimmera River

Vessel number

HV000599

Date

1906

Description

The craft is 4.0m long, 680mm wide and 225mm deep. The profile is relatively straight through the main part of the hull, and the ends rise slightly to create an enclosed rim to the canoe. The tapered ends are one of the hallmarks of these craft, cut deliberately into the long and narrow bark section as it is removed from the tree. The thickness is a key to its strength, and this craft has edges showing 20 mm or greater thickness which is sufficient to create a rigid monocoque structure once the material dries out. Further distinct shaping to the cross section to give it higher sides and the final tapering of the ends is probably done once the piece is on the ground, using a combination of heat from fire and additional moisture from water. These craft usually have two branches across the canoe and supporting the sides as beams, but they are not recorded for this example. The tree commonly used for these canoes' construction is the river red gum *Eucalyptus camadulensis*. It is widespread throughout the inland of mainland Australia, found in open forest and woodlands and usually growing along the inland rivers, watercourses and floodplains. A spear was included with the canoe. It is a three pointed trident configuration about 3.65m (12 feet) long with a strong shaft. It is known that these craft were propelled along by the paddler standing toward the middle and paddling with his spear. The canoe and spear were donated in 1906 to the British Museum by Prof. JW Gregory (1864-1932) who is recorded in the Australian Dictionary of Biography. He was an English geologist, geographer and explorer, and had built up an extensive background and reputation in these fields before he came to Australia in 1901. The University of Melbourne created a new chair in geology and mineralogy and Gregory was appointed in December 1899. From 1901-04 Gregory was also the director of the Geological Survey of Victoria, and in this role visited most of the mining areas. In the summer of 1901-02 he led a student scientific expedition around Lake Eyre and the title of the book he wrote about the trip 'The Dead Heart of Australia' (1906), created the well-known phrase 'dead heart' for the central deserts of Australia. In May 1904 Gregory left Australia to continue his work at the University of Glasgow. It must be assumed that he acquired the canoe during his field work in western Victoria, and on return to the UK, arranged for it to be donated to the British Museum. It is numbered Oc1906,1015.1 and the trident spear in 1015.2. The Wimmera River is in north western Victoria, beginning in Djalwurung country then passing through Jardwadjali and Wergaia lands. The headwaters are in the Pyrenees to the west of Melbourne, it flows westwards and northwards into Lake Hindmarsh and Lake Albacutya. On especially wet occasions it continues into a chain of ephemeral lakes further north in Wyperfeld National Park and the Big Desert Wilderness Park. The Wimmera River is one of a handful of northward flowing rivers in Victoria that do not

join the Murray River, but they lie in the great plains that lie to either side of this major river. Well known towns in the area include Warracknabeal, Horsham, Dimboola and Jeparit. This craft compares well with other existing yuki that have been documented on the ARHV, including the craft from Avoca Station HV000161, Bunumbert Lake HV000412 and Bolton, HV000526. It has similar proportions and shaping confirming the consistent characteristics developed over the many generations they were built. The location of its acquisition in Western Victoria increases the known distribution of this special type away from the direct tributaries to the main Murray Darling river system, indicating a widespread sharing of knowledge and implements by communities in the extensive riverine district of inland southern Australia.

Dimensions

Vessel Dimensions: 4 m × 0.68 m (13.12 ft × 2.23 ft)