

Basic Detail Report



Single Outrigger Indigenous Canoe

Vessel number

HV000533

Description

The Single Outrigger Indigenous Canoe held in the Tasmanian Art Gallery and Museum (TMAG) collection is an intriguing Indigenous watercraft in terms of its construction and possible intended use. No supporting documentation exists, and whilst it is possible from

observation to comment accurately on the structure and location of its origins, its intended use is more speculative. The craft is 2.5 metres long, and just under a metre wide overall. The main hull is also 2.5 metres long, about 400mm deep and over 350 mm wide, while the outrigger log is around 150mm in diameter throughout. There are three sets of beams for the outrigger, and indications that a fourth set could have been employed as well, but has since been lost or removed. The outriggers pass through gunwale planks that are stitched onto on the main hull or through the hull at the bow, and secure to double posts at the outrigger. It has a platform at the aft end, and both ends of the hull are shaped and tapered. These are all conventional details for a single outrigger craft; however the length dimension in particular is relatively short. Australian Indigenous outriggers have only been recorded in Torres Strait and then Queensland, on either side of Cape York. The arrangement and details link this craft to the Cape Melville and Cooktown area of north east Queensland. Records show that this region was the only area in Queensland where the single outrigger craft were used, elsewhere double outriggers were built. There are two styles of single outrigger and they share the same full length outrigger supported by a multiple number of double beams. One style, at present recorded only around Cape Melville, has a crafted shape and taper to the hull ends with a single platform aft, whereas the southern style seen in the Cooktown region has a square cut across the log hull at both ends, and some examples have twin platforms at either end. Therefore the details on this craft correspond very closely with the northern style of single outrigger, indicating it came from a community at or near Cape Melville. It is in fair condition, there is severe damage to one of the gunwale planks and the caulking has fallen away as well. The main hull has a number of small splits and cracks as well, and the use of metal staples at some of these splits along with galvanised 'clothesline wire' at some of the connections suggests repairs made at some point after the craft had been built. How it was used is not clear, however its size is such that there is sufficient volume to support one person, and it has a paddle that is the right size for an adult to use, and is wide enough overall to be very stable. It is not a scale model of the full sized craft which are around five metres or more long. Examples of scale models seen in other museum collections show a craft where all proportions have been brought down to the scale used, and if this were to be a 2.5 metre scaled version the overall beam would be less, stability would be compromised, and the hull volume would be much smaller and unlikely to support even

a child. Child's canoes, which were smaller versions of the full size craft, are well known in other types and many institutions have examples, but no examples have yet been clearly identified in connection with Queensland outriggers, so without that supporting evidence it is difficult to suggest that this is a child's canoe. The proportions indicate this craft was capable of use and would have handled moderate rough water conditions close to shore. A more likely possibility is that it was deliberately made as a demonstration craft for a collector, and kept to a smaller length so it was easier for the collector to transport. The Alexander Morrison Collection of Indigenous material at the Australian Museum notes this arrangement where items were made on commission to represent an object, and in this case it is a workable example, but foreshortened to make the length more manageable. The craft is currently in storage at the TMAG warehouse in Rosny, Tasmania.

Dimensions

Vessel Dimensions: 2.5 m x 0.92 m (8.2 ft x 3.02 ft)