



Indigenous Bark Canoe E078218

Vessel number

HV000593

Description

The Indigenous bark canoe came into the Australian Museum collection between 1975 and 1982 and was numbered E078218, however it is likely to be much older than this period. It came to the museum as part of the Alexander Morrison Collection of Indigenous material,

through a dealer John Magers. This collection is a wide range of implements and artefacts from NSW and Queensland regions that was collected in the late 19th century and early 20th century by Alexander Morrison. He was from Singleton in the NSW Hunter Valley, where he ran a printing business, published a newspaper and became the district coroner for about 30 years. Morrison was an avid collector of many things, and appears to have been influenced by a widespread community interest in Indigenous people to begin collecting Australian Indigenous artefacts as well. A lot of material came from the St Clair Mission near Singleton, and included people from the Wonnarua, the Awabakal, Worimi and Darkinjung communities. It is thought that many of the objects were made for Morrison on commission to represent an object that was used in their traditional lifestyle. There are records of this collection being displayed only once by Morrison. For the visit of the State Governor Sir Harry Rawson on 27 April 1904, a ceremonial arch was erected in the main street of Singleton. The arch decoratively displayed artefacts from Morrison's collection and was the focal point for the processional route of the Governor. On each side of the arch there is a canoe at the top, but the indistinct nature of the image makes it difficult to confirm if this canoe was included. The single sheet of eucalyptus bark is most likely to be a river red gum bark, the tree most widely used for bark canoe construction on the inland waterways. The bark is carefully marked out to the shape required, and then prised off the tree chosen so there were no branches or other flaws in the sheet and often with curved profile already formed through the bend in the trunk. The bark is then formed using heat and water, sometimes in a pit moulded to the final desired shape; other methods included weighting it with stones or tying it with bark rope. The sides between both ends remain relatively parallel and rise up to give sufficient freeboard. The craft is missing any branches or beams that were put into these craft to act as frames, and has one end damaged. The actual origins of the craft and where it came from are not clear. The details of the shape and structure show quite clearly a Murray Darling yuki canoe, and therefore unlikely to have been made by the Hunter Valley communities who built the very different tied bark style canoe. One of these is also in the Morrison Collection HV000499, and this yuki canoe was possibly collected by Morrison or Magers from another source.

Dimensions

Vessel Dimensions: 3.3 m (10.83 ft)