Basic Detail Report

Gunggandji Indigenous Outrigger Canoe

Vessel number

HV000443

Date

1915

Description

The Gunggandji Indigenous outrigger canoe type was also documented by anthropologist Walter Roth when he was in the area in the late 1890s. His paper was published in 1910: North Queensland Ethnography Bulletin No 14, Transport and Trade. Roth observed various outriggers down the east and west coasts of Cape York, and recorded sketches and descriptions. There were distinct changes as he moved south, and this example is a type he observed from Mossman River down to Cape Grafton or Yarrabah. The main hull is a dugout with the hollowed out inside shaped from a single log. The more or less circular cross section has a narrow opening at the top and expert craftsmanship would have been needed to work in the concave areas at the sides of the interior. On the outside, the ends have a unique form. Both ends are cut square to the axis, and have a flap type extension of the bark and trunk remaining at the top, protruding around 400 mm or so beyond the cut. This extension is seen on other types further north but is usually restricted to the bow. Roth recorded that it was used as a platform for a hunter, from which he could spear turtle or dugong. Any other use or perhaps what they could symbolize is not recorded, however it is conceivable that they would also act as a spray deflector when heading into choppy seas, keeping water out of the hull. The outrigger hull is a much smaller diameter solid log, shaped a little at the ends. Roth's notes indicate that the float or outrigger is called 'bunul' by the Gunggandji people of Yarrabah. Bunul is the term used for the mullet fish and would reflect the outrigger's ability to easily glide tor skim across the watersurface. It is connected to the main hull with four sets of double beams and twin sticks forming an 'X' shaped cross. The sets of beams are lashed through holes to the main hull on both sides or gunwale edges of the opening in the main hull, and the branches on each pair are about 100 mm apart. The outer ends of the beams are then tied to the centre of the X, one above and one below the crossing of the sticks. The sticks are driven into holes in the outrigger. The double arrangement of beams, their spacing and securing at either end provides a degree of cross bracing and stiffness to the complete structure, which is basically a simple and effective cantilever operating in two planes; fore and aft, and vertically. The craft could accommodate five or six people according to a report from anthropologist Walter Roth. He noted that they sat on the double beams passing through both gunwales, with their legs crossed over due to the narrow gap cut in the log. They were used along the shore and amongst the islands just offshore of this coastline. It is not recorded if they went further out to sea. The type is believed to be the most southern outrigger and dugout type used by Indigenous communities on the eastern coastline. The concept of the structure can be compared to the

more sophisticated and detailed outriggers of Torres Strait, which would have been an influence on the development of the various mainland types of outrigger. This example was donated to the museum in 1915 by Dr Ronald Hamlyn-Harris. In 2010 it is on loan from the Queensland Museum and is on display at the Menmuny Museum at Yarrabah. Prepared from material supplied by the Queensland Museum and Walter Roth's North Queensland Ethnography Bulletin No 14, Transport and Trade. 1910, published online by the Australiian Museum

Dimensions

Vessel Dimensions: 3.81 m x 1.32 m (12.5 ft x 4.33 ft)