

Basic Detail Report



Red gum log boat

Vessel number

HV000509

Description

The red gum log boat has a shell-like hull with the sides formed in one piece from the trunk of a red gum, and markings on the interior show how the tree was hollowed

out with axes and other hand tools. The rounded hull section has a substantial thickness, around 50mm or so, and the ends show a series of nails remaining intact that held panels of wood in the manner of a transom and transom bow, as seen on pram dinghies. One end has been pulled up a little higher and narrower than the other end, suggesting it was the bow. There are is a 25 mm diameter hole at the corners of this end, possibly used to locate ropes that were spliced or knotted to the vessel for securing it when not in use. A series of proportionally spaced nail holes are visible along the top edges, and on the centreline in the interior, a shallow sump and drain channels have been carved into the timber. There are cutouts along the side as well, shallow semi-circular in shape, and their purpose is not known. The one piece nature of the hull is very similar to the Indigenous bark canoes common to this region. They were formed using the thick bark from a red gum, and were a one piece panel entirely, with a bow and stern shaped into the natural curve of the bark from the tree. In this case they have used the actual tree trunk, carving it back to be similar in concept, but then used a typical dinghy transom panel to close off the open ends. It was discovered in a dried out lagoon bed near Wahgunyah, Victoria around 2009, a short distance from the mouth of a stream that feeds into the Murray River. This was toward the end of a long drought affecting much of south east Australia, which had become quite severe, and many watercourses dried out completely. It was found in conjunction with the remains of a couple of other small wooden planked vessels that were seriously deteriorated. However the hull shape formed by the solid red gum trunk was remarkably intact. The property owner moved the craft to higher ground so that it would not be lost when the lagoon filled again which has since happened with the drought breaking in 2010. The owner discussed the craft with local people, and one recalled there had been a such a craft described in use in the 1860s which ferried people and goods along the river, indicating the idea had been used, but not suggesting it was this craft in particular. This one may have used the local creek to ferry things from the busy port at Wahgunyah to a homestead a short distance away. There is no indication of how it might have been propelled, but without any rollocks for oars, and a relatively flat wide shape that would not be very suitable for oars or paddling in the style of a canoe, it is possible it was poled along in a manner similar to the local indigenous canoes. Its heavy mass probably gave it quite good stability, and there is sufficient volume and freeboard to carry a modest load. In 2012 the red gum log boat remains clear of the water, and plans are being considered for its preservation in the local area, as an example of one of the more intriguing craft built with available materials in regional Australia.

Dimensions

Vessel Dimensions: 4 m x 0.9 m (13.12 ft x 2.95 ft)